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ABSTRACT

The Providence Blueprint for Education study (PROBE) gathered as much information as possible about the status of Providence (Rhode Island) schools, collecting data from parents, teachers, the government, school administrators, and the public to paint a broad picture of the schools and areas for improvement. Information was collected from the following area committees: (1) budget and facilities; (2) students; (3) teachers and curriculum; (4) parents; (5) governance; and (6) the community. The study found a school system confused about priorities, interested in personal rewards, patronage possibilities, or bureaucratic functions. It is argued that, in fact, the only interest group is the young people of Providence. With major changes in attitudes and priorities, a climate for learning can be established that meets the needs of the city's youth. Specific recommendations are made for changes for people and structures. Appendixes present a brief profile of the school system and a school/community report. Eight tables and 25 figures present information about Providence students, staff, and schools. (SLD)

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The Report of the PROBE Commission

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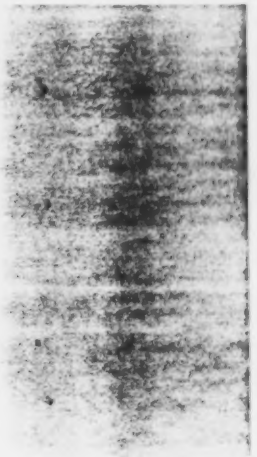

PROVIDENCE BLUEPRINT FOR EDUCATION

An independent, community-wide assessment of the Providence Public Schools sponsored by the Public Education Fund

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To Juanita
because she cared
about the invisible kids

Juanita Sanchez (1953–1992)
Member of the PROBE Commission

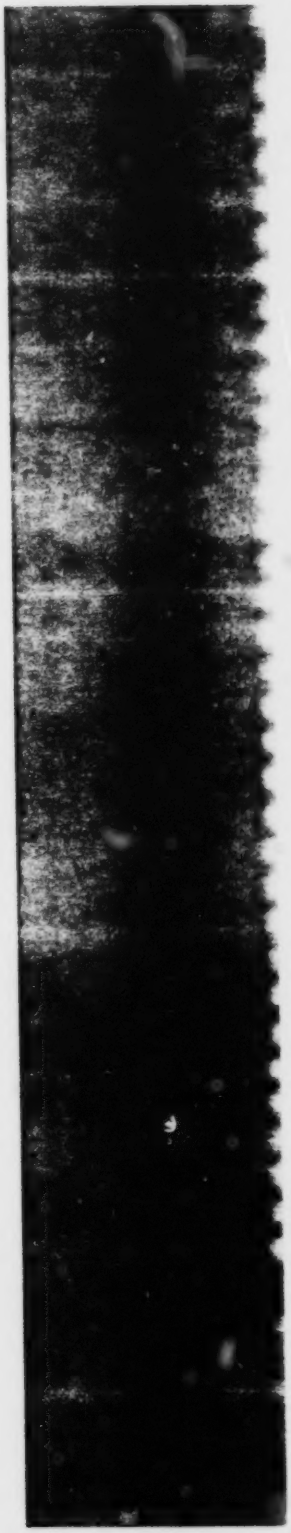

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Table of Contents

Chapter One
Letter to the People of Providence 1

Chapter Two
How We Proceeded 5

Chapter Three
What We Found 11

Chapter Four
What Is Possible 27

Chapter Five
What Must Be Done 29

Chapter Six
Who Will Do It And When 101

Appendices
Appendix A: Brief Profile of the Providence School System 107
Appendix B: School/Community Report 111

Table of Recommendations

IMAGINE WHAT YOU WILL SEE IN THE PROVIDENCE SCHOOLS...

...WHEN PEOPLE CHANGE

Recommendation 1. Recognize and Resolve 32

...WHEN STRUCTURES CHANGE

Smaller Schools Units

Recommendation 2. Create Smaller Learning Environments 34

More Time for Education

Recommendation 3. Lengthen Student Working Day 42
Recommendation 4. Lengthen Teacher Working Day 43
Recommendation 5. Expect Teachers to Meet With Parents 44
Recommendation 6. Lengthen Teacher Working Year 44

Hiring and Contract Processes

Recommendation 7. Redesign Process for School Board Appointments 45
Recommendation 8. Conduct National Search for Superintendent 47
Recommendation 9. Conduct National Search for Administrators 47
Recommendation 10. Institute School-Based Hiring for Teachers 48
Recommendation 11. Establish and Enforce a Strict Code of Ethics 50
Recommendation 12. Redesign the Budget Process 51
Recommendation 13. Allow Principals to Choose Their Staffs 51
Recommendation 14. Revise Accountability of Custodial Services 52

Participatory Processes

Recommendation 15. Organize Regular Discussion Sessions for Teachers 54
Recommendation 16. Organize Student Committees 55
Recommendation 17. Establish Informal Student Town Meetings 56
Recommendation 18. Establish Informal Parent Town Meetings 57
Recommendation 19. Redesign Monthly Principal Meetings 57

Table of Recommendations

School Goals

Recommendation 20. Establish Goals by and within Each School 58

School-Based Management

Recommendation 21. Establish Site Management at Five Prototype Schools 64

...WHEN RESOURCES CHANGE

Professional Development and Evaluation

Recommendation 22. Institute Professional Development and Evaluation of School Board 68

Recommendation 23. Institute Professional Development and Evaluation of Central Administration 69

Recommendation 24. Institute Professional Development and Evaluation of Principals 70

Recommendation 25. Institute Professional Development and Evaluation of Teachers: Mentoring, Intervention, Peer Coaching, Recognition of Excellence 71

Recommendation 26. Institute School-Based Development Designed by Teachers 74

Recommendation 27. Institute New System for Teacher and Staff Evaluation and Termination for Unsatisfactory Performance 76

Increased Financial and Professional Resources

Recommendation 28. Implement 60/40 Funding for Providence and Guaranteed Student Entitlement 77

Recommendation 29. Hire Full-Time Grant Writer 81

Recommendation 30. Allocate Funds to Address Immediate Priority Needs 81

Recommendation 31. Encourage Community to Donate Expertise and Facilities 83

Recommendation 32. Offer Social Services in Four to Six Schools 84

Recommendation 33. Increase Business Community Involvement in Schools 85

Recommendation 34. Support Early Childhood Education 87

Recommendation 35. Support Multicultural Arts Programs 87

Data Support and Information Sharing

Recommendation 36. Develop Integrated and Networked Data Collection and Dissemination System 88

Recognition of Promising Programs and Review of Weak Areas

Recommendation 37. Support and Recognize Promising Programs 91

Recommendation 38. Review and Improve Areas of Concern 94

IF THERE IS INSUFFICIENT PROGRESS...

Recommendation 39. Explore Alternatives for Radical, Permanent Change 99

List of Tables and Figures

Figure 2.1 PROBE Organization and Data Collection 6
Figure 3.1 Total Student Population 13
Figure 3.2 Percentage of Total Student Population by Race/Ethnicity 13
Table 3.1 Comparison of Average MAT Percentiles by Grade 16
Figure 3.3 Comparison of Combined 1991 SAT Percentiles for Comparable Urban Districts 17
Figure 3.4 Comparison of 1991–92 Racial/Ethnic Mix of Total Student Population and Classical High School 19
Figure 3.5 Comparison of 1991–92 Racial/Ethnic Mix of Total Student Population and Gifted and Talented Program Students 19
Figure 3.6 Comparison of 1991–92 Average Per-Pupil Expenditure by District 22
Figure 3.7 Comparison of Average Dollars Contributed by City and State Governments 23
Figure 3.8 Comparison of 1991–92 Ratio of Students to Central Administrators 23
Figure 3.9 Comparison of 1991–92 Ratio of Students to Building Administrators 24
Table 3.2 Comparison of 1991–92 Average Teachers' Salary, Years Teaching, and Number of Master's Degrees Held by District 24
Table 3.3 Comparison of Hours Students Spend in School per Year by District 25
Table 3.4 Comparison of Hours Required for Teachers To Be in School Building per Year by District 25
Figure 4.1 Schematic of PROBE Recommendations 30
Table 5.1 High School Students' Perceptions of Classroom Activities 36
Table 5.2 Comparison of the Hiring Process between Providence and Dayton School Districts 49
Figure 5.1 Comparison of Percentage of Nonwhite Teachers to Nonwhite Students in Selected School Districts 49
Table 5.3 Student's Reaction to School Problems 55
Figure 5.2 Comparison of 1991–92 Racial/Ethnic Diversity of Teachers and Students 62
Figure 5.3 Ratio of Students to Central Administrators 70
Figure 5.4 Comparison of Student Population Variables: Providence and Rhode Island 78
Figure 5.5 Comparison of 1989–90 Per-Pupil Expenditures in Rhode Island School Districts 79
Figure 5.6 Comparison of 1990–91 Equalized Tax Rates in Rhode Island Communities 79
Figure 5.7 Comparison of 1990–91 Per-Pupil Expenditures by District 79
Figure 5.8 Comparison of 1991–91 State and Local Funding Received by Communities 80
Figure 5.9 Comparison of 1990–91 Per-Pupil Expenditures by Local and State Governments 80
Table 5.4 Projected Providence Yield from Revisited State Programs 80
Figure 5.10 Comparison of MAT Reading and Language Percentiles 94
Figure 5.11 Racial/Ethnic Diversity of Students Enrolled at Classical High School 97
Figure 5.12 Racial/Ethnic Diversity of Students Enrolled in AP Courses 97
Figure 5.13 Racial/Ethnic Diversity of Students Enrolled in the Gifted and Talented Program 98
Figure 6.1 Time Line Implementation of PROBE Recommendations 102

LETTER TO THE PEOPLE OF PROVIDENCE

Chapter One

PROBE has concluded without question that better schools are within the reach of Providence. Further, we believe that the time has come for insisting on higher expectations and—then—for realizing them.

This report is a message of encouragement, not despair. It is an attempt to be perceptively honest about where the Providence public schools currently stand, what steps need to be taken to change them, and what results can be expected from the consequent transformation. Our findings are thorough; we touched on practically every aspect of the school system. Our prescriptions are simple enough so that progress is easily measurable.

Now, where did we come from, and where do we go? The Providence Blueprint for Education began as the brainchild of the Public Education Fund (PEF) with support from the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce. The concept of a thorough, independent study of the Providence public schools was embraced by the Providence Teachers Union and by the School Department, two key players in any such endeavor. The list of our sponsors (and we urge you to study the names of those who were willing to take a risk) demonstrates the clear interest and concern of the business and academic community.

From the outset, the Mayor of Providence, Vincent A. Cianci, Jr., pledged his cooperation and guarantee of independence. We were assured of, and then received, a full measure of genuine cooperation from the Superintendent, Arthur Zarrella, and the two Teachers Union presidents, Marcia Reback and her successor, Phyllis Tennian.

Our first task was to enlist the help of a 33-member commission to guide the work of the staff. The members of that key group were drawn from the heart of Providence—its neighborhoods, homes of students, and leadership circles. The citizens of Providence have every reason to be proud of this splendid collection of their best. They have given unstintingly of their time, patience, and wisdom.

This Commission and the people of Providence have been served with high distinction by the staff of PROBE and by the multitude of volunteers who are listed elsewhere in this report. Personally and for the Commission, I point with deep gratitude to our director, Dan Challener, our master of research, Ann Abeille, and to Margaretta Edwards and Yvonne Uribe. All of them brought uncommon strength as well as common sense to this enterprise.

Many reports regarding urban school systems have emerged from closed-door conference rooms dominated by blue ribbon panels of professional educators talking about solutions, not causes. In the PROBE study we chose, instead, to gather as much data as possible. As part of this process, we listened to the users: the students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Their responses to our queries were often overwhelming in number and fervor. This report is, in part, a reflection of their perceptions that are both honest and unavoidable. Whether one agrees with what they say, their perceptions are real and forcibly expressed.

The PROBE Commission set for itself six goals:

- to provide Providence with an accurate and realistic description of its schools;
- to conduct an independent assessment of the quality of those schools;
- to make practical, feasible recommendations for specific improvements and for ways to strengthen community involvement and support;

❖ to encourage communication among all groups and individuals who seek to strengthen the schools;
❖ to disseminate PROBE's report to all who might be interested; and
❖ to develop a plan for monitoring progress toward achieving what is proposed.

At the same time that we went about conducting our work, we noted with approbation and enthusiasm the parallel efforts at the state level embodied in the reports of the 21st Century Commission and the national as well as the R.I. Skills Commissions. Many of our recommendations fit in neat harmony with what these worthy groups have concluded.

Our focus throughout this report is on the interaction of the individual student with the teacher in the classroom setting. We believe that all else in the school system exists in order to support that central relationship. Our recommendations flow to and from the center. If we propose, for example, a stronger School Board, we do so in order to strengthen the exchange between teacher and student. If we point to the pressing need for better communication between teacher and principal, it comes from our concern about the way that teacher inspires that student.

The package of recommendations proposed by PROBE, then, is just that—a package centered on the teacher/student encounter. It is not a collection of stand-alone propositions. It calls for the contribution to the total effort of every major player. Being a student in the Providence schools should be an exciting, sometimes exhausting, adventure. Right now, for thousands of Providence children, that's not the case. But it could happen here IF...

❖ The Superintendent is willing to take risks and is secure enough to be gloriously right and, on occasion, gloriously wrong.

❖ The School Board faces its job and does it. The ball is in its court.

❖ The teachers recognize that they can be both professionals and union members with obligations first to the students.

❖ The Teachers Union acknowledges that now is the time to stand behind the deep professional aspirations of its members and to make the job of teaching in Providence genuinely satisfying for everyone.

❖ The students mean what they say when they ask for more and better learning opportunities.

❖ Parents support students and their schools by active concern and involvement.

❖ The principals and other administrators stop choosing to hide behind trivia and make greater efforts to listen and to lead.

❖ The Mayor is strong in his support of reform in all areas, including City Hall.

❖ The City Council pauses to see what the schools' priorities really ought to be, then acts consistently on this basis.

❖ The Governor and General Assembly recognize that Rhode Island must do a far better job of looking out for Providence with its unique populations and problems.

❖ The business community puts a high priority on help in many forms to the schools—and then really becomes committed and involved.

❖ The universities and social agencies offer to the schools the services of their ample supply of experts to help define problems and then find solutions.

❖ PEF and other nonprofit and public agencies working with PEF keep a sharp eye on the adequacy of the movement toward change. We want good public schools but it should not take forever to realize that eminently worthy goal.

When all of these IFs are translated into solid, consistent school support, they add up to a giant WOW! Yes, it can happen here.

This report is, in more than one sense, a product of its time. It has been compiled in the midst of a severe economic turndown. New funds for education are not readily available from any of the usual sources. We do not, therefore, dream expensive dreams. We do believe that essential, major changes can be made without reliance on new funding. In order to implement the few recommendations that may require additional monies, a combined approach may be advisable—reallocation of existing funds plus private gifts and grants from local and national sources, such as businesses, foundations, and the federal government.

By our count, only 15% of the Commission's recommendations may necessitate extra funds. One cannot and should not use cost to oppose the PROBE program. Many new initiatives are possible almost immediately. At the end of the report, we have included a time line to show when an initiative should be expected and who should take the leadership. Bold leadership is the principal tool with which to build this house.

The recommendations in this report are aimed not only at raising expectations but liberating the huge supply of energy contained in the desire for change that PROBE heard from so many sources. We must transform the schools so that everyone is faced with serious challenges and high expectations. Most important, we must reform the Providence schools so that students are engaged intellectually, beginning with basic skills education.

Our goal is not to give students more busywork or to ask them to spend more time listening to lectures. We must create the best possible learning experience that is rigorous but exciting and that frees them to be human beings of great dignity and value. To ask for anything less would be to cheat our children.

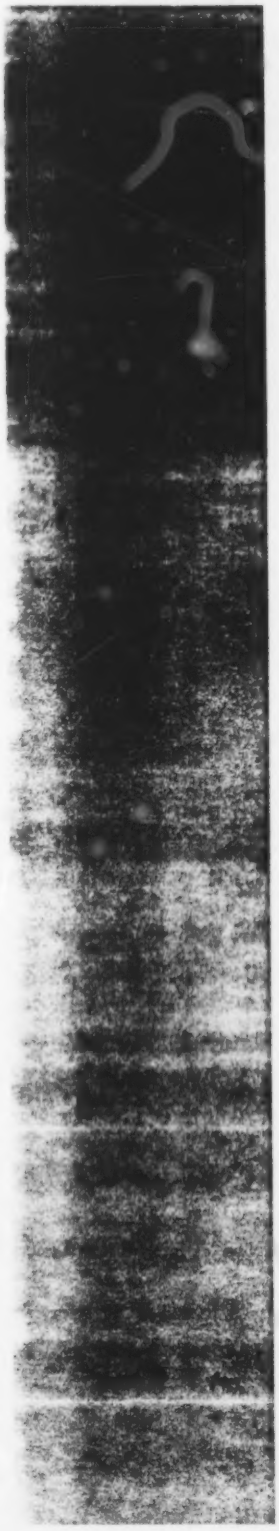
At its base, then, PROBE is saying to everyone associated with the schools, "Take a chance and work together. Give up your defensive position. Sail away from your island. It is time to pursue pride in your schools, not power over them."

Yes, it can happen here.

Edward D. Eddy, Chair
Providence Blueprint for Education

How We Proceeded

Chapter Two



One of the overall goals of the PROBE Commission is "to provide the Providence community with an accurate and realistic description of the city's public schools and the responsibilities and concerns of the people who work in the schools." Given such a goal, PROBE has chosen to take a broad-based approach, looking at aspects as different as the budget, student outcomes, and experiences of teachers. The schematic on pages 6 and 7 illustrates not only the wide-ranging areas of data collection and the variety of methods used, but also the importance of the PROBE Commission and its various committees in carrying out our research.

Role of the PROBE Commission and the Area Committees

Under the chairmanship of Edward D. Eddy, President Emeritus of the University of Rhode Island, a diverse group of 33 parents and community leaders was assembled to carry out the study. This group, collectively known as the PROBE Commission, brought expertise in a variety of different fields: bilingual education, fiscal management, teaching, youth programs, city planning, educational administration and research, and government operations. One-half of the PROBE Commission members are from Providence's minority communities. A similar percentage are parents of children in Providence public schools. No member of the PROBE Commission is an employee of the Providence public schools.

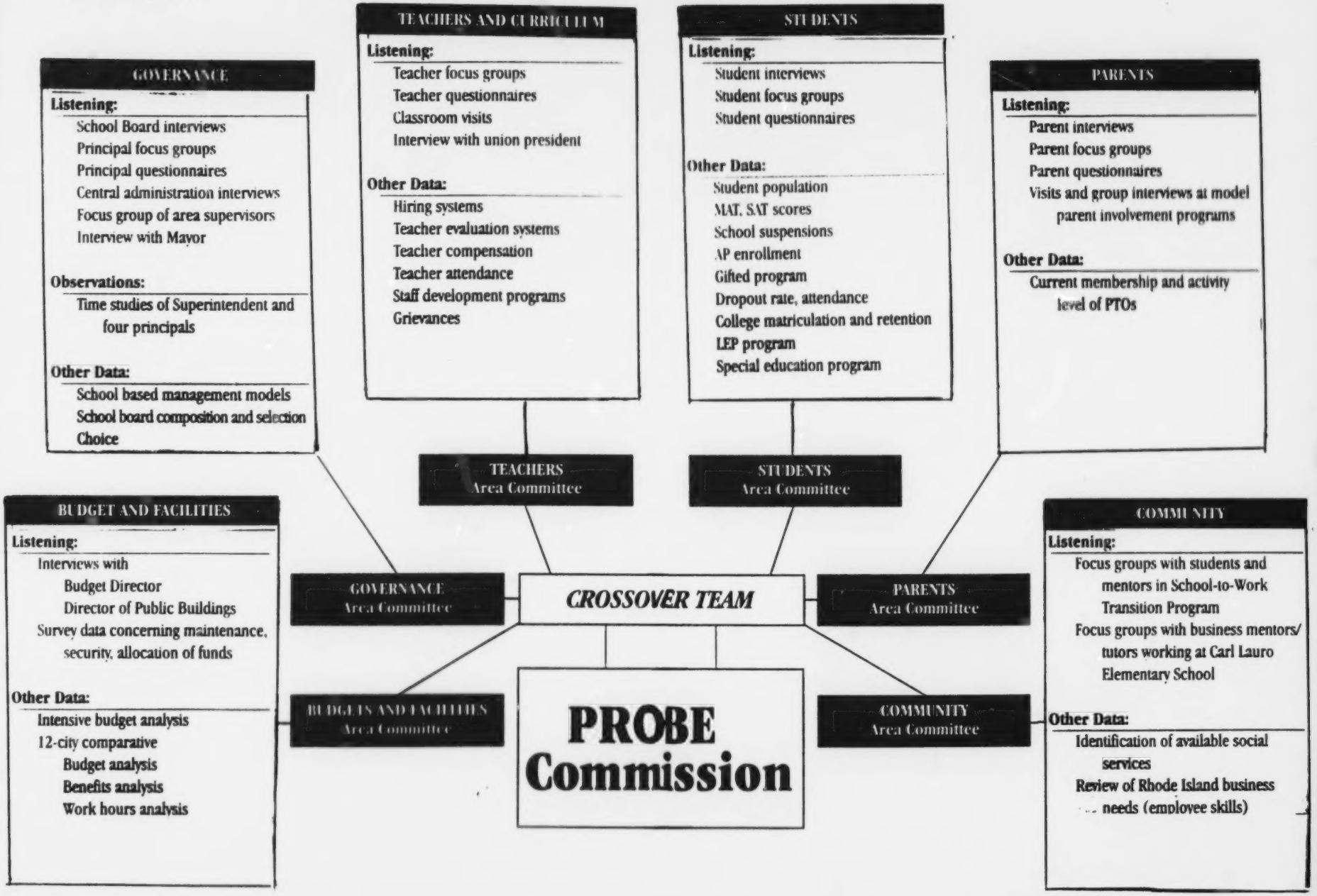
Members of the Commission chose to be involved with one of six different Area Committees: Budget and Facilities, Students, Teachers and Curriculum, Parents, Governance, and Community. Additional members of the Providence community with particular interests and expertise were invited to work on these committees. Because of the difference in the nature of the areas to be explored, the tasks identified by each committee and the data collection approaches varied.

The first task of each Area Committee was to identify with staff what they believed to be the key research questions to be addressed within the realm of that committee. The next steps taken by these groups were variable and ranged from conducting interviews to analyzing budget documents.

Once the data had been collected, all Area Committee members then formulated, from their points of view, the key areas to be addressed by PROBE's recommendations. The Crossover Team (made up of a few members from each Area Committee) met to identify common areas of concern across the committees and to participate in open-ended discussion of potential recommendations. Finally, Commission members reviewed and discussed draft recommendations.

The individual contributions made by Commission and Area Committee members to PROBE's research efforts were invaluable. Not enough can be said about the value added by Commission members through their time, ideas, insights, and enthusiasm. PROBE has operated with a small staff and limited funds. This assessment of Providence public schools could not have occurred without all the community volunteers who made PROBE's unique approach happen. These people, in all their individual ways, have communicated to the people of Providence the message that the schools are important, that individual citizens can make a difference, and that change is possible.

FIGURE 2.1
PROBE ORGANIZATION
AND DATA COLLECTION



Data Collection

1. PROBE analyzed data from documents supplied by the Providence School Department and from data requests made to school personnel. A partial list includes:

- ❖ budget information,
- ❖ teacher attendance,
- ❖ teacher grievances,
- ❖ MAT and SAT scores,
- ❖ Advanced Placement (AP) enrollment,
- ❖ dropout rate,
- ❖ college matriculation and retention,
- ❖ special education enrollment,
- ❖ teacher salaries and benefits,
- ❖ curriculum offerings,
- ❖ student demographics,
- ❖ student suspensions,
- ❖ gifted program enrollment,
- ❖ student attendance, and
- ❖ social services availability.

2. PROBE also collected data about school systems in comparison cities.

Budgets. PROBE chose to compare budget information gathered about Providence schools with data from the budgets of 11 other urban districts comparable in the size and racial/ethnic diversity of the student population. Eight of the 11 districts are from the Northeast (Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, Pawtucket, Rochester, Springfield, Syracuse, Worcester), and five of the 11 are recognized by many to be exemplary urban districts (Dayton, New Haven, Pittsburgh, Rochester, San Antonio). Districts were first compared in such areas as community demographics, student achievement scores, racial and gender characteristics, and personnel data and teacher characteristics. Further comparisons were made using revenue and expense data from these districts.

Teacher Contracts. Teacher contracts were obtained from seven of the 11 comparable school districts, four of which are from exemplary districts. Contracts were not available from four of the 11 districts. Comparisons were made on the amount of time the students and teachers are required to spend in school, class sizes, and health insurance and other benefits.

Other Comparative Data. Through telephone and written requests, PROBE was able to obtain comparative data from the 11 districts; for example, the average number of teacher sick days, the ratio of students to central administrators, the ratio of students to building administrators, and the ratio of students to guidance counselors.

3. Structured observations were used for performing time studies of the Superintendent and four school principals who agreed to participate. PROBE conducted one-day studies of the five administrators.

4. From the beginning, PROBE felt that in order to present a valid picture of the Providence schools and in order to develop recommendations for change that would receive broad-based support from within and outside of the school system, we needed to listen carefully to the people involved with the schools—students, teachers, administrators, parents, School Board members, business people, and many others. This part of the data collection was designed to provide not only an accurate picture of the schools, but also significant ownership of the findings and recommendations within the schools and the community.

Focus Groups. PROBE staff conducted 24 focus groups of teachers, students, parents, principals and assistant principals, central administrators, students in special programs, and business people involved in the schools. Participants were randomly selected in order to avoid systematic bias.

Interviews. Structured interviews were conducted of School Board members, the Superintendent, many central administrators and directors, the Providence Teachers Union President, and the Mayor. Many more interviews of a more informal nature were conducted by all involved.

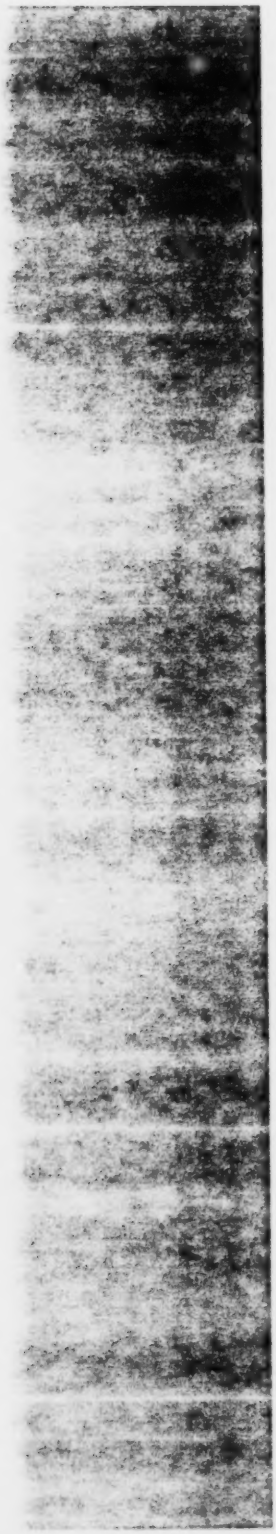
Questionnaires. Based on the concerns voiced in focus groups and interviews, written questionnaires were developed and administered to teachers, principals, high school students, and parents of Providence students. Surveys were distributed to all teachers and principals and to a stratified random sample of high school students (by grade and school). Questionnaires were distributed to parents of Providence students using several methods. The following is a brief description of sampling and data collection techniques used for each group.

Teachers. Questionnaires were distributed to all teachers in the Providence public schools. Approximately one-half of the teachers received the survey during release time. Surveys with postage-paid envelopes were put in the individual mail boxes of all other teachers. Within three months, 806 teachers (64% of the 1,250 classroom teachers employed by Providence in 1991–92) had returned their surveys. The sample of teachers was representative of the total teaching force in terms of years of experience, level of teaching (elementary, middle, or high school), gender, and race/ethnicity.

Principals. Questionnaires were sent to all 32 principals. Seventy-one percent were completed and returned. Approximately 61% of elementary school principals, 83% of middle school principals, 60% of high school principals, and 50% of vocational education principals responded.

High School Students. Surveys were completed by 368 students from all five high schools in Providence. Stratified random samples were by each grade level within each high school. The percentage return from students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds was almost identical to the breakdowns of the overall high school population. Of the PROBE student sample, 24% were black, 25% Hispanic, 10% Asian, 32% white, 9% other. Forty-two percent of the surveys were completed by males, 58% by females.

Parents. Over a four-month period, several thousand written questionnaires were distributed to parents in Providence using such various methods as sending surveys home with children; distributing surveys at parent meetings and school events; distributing surveys through community centers, churches, and community organizations; and at summer work and free-lunch programs.



In total, 626 completed surveys were returned from a broad cross section of parents from different schools and different racial/ethnic backgrounds. The racial/ethnic background of the survey respondents is similar to the breakdown of the school population with the exception of whites, who are slightly overrepresented in our group, and Hispanics, who are slightly underrepresented. Additionally, 79% of the parents responding were women.

Parent/Teacher Organizations (PTOs). Written questionnaires were distributed to the school mailboxes of each PTO president. Responses were received from 12 of the 32 organizations. These represented 25% of elementary schools, 67% of middle schools, 40% of high schools, and 50% of vocational schools.

School Visits. Informal visits were arranged and conducted in 12 schools in Providence. During each of these visits, PROBE staff, Commission members, and Area Committee members held extensive conversations with the principal, toured the building, visited some classrooms and spent time in the teachers' lounge listening to teachers' concerns. These were not formal observations or interviews, but greatly enriched the understanding of school issues on the part of all visitors.

What We Found

Chapter Three

Over the course of 18 months, PROBE examined the Providence public schools with wide-open eyes and ears. PROBE collected data on a broad spectrum of topics, from graduation rates to student suspension rates, from MAT scores to absentee rates, from budget expenditures to teacher grievances. At the same time we were collecting these data, we were also listening to the people most intimately involved in the schools: the students, teachers, principals, parents, administrators, and School Board members. Over the 18 months of our research, we interviewed and surveyed more than 2,000 people. We conducted more than two dozen focus groups of randomly selected teachers, parents, principals, and administrators, as well as students from every high school and four middle schools in Providence. We interviewed eight of nine School Board members, the Mayor, and the Teachers Union President. To our knowledge, no other study of a school system has ever done as much listening as PROBE did.

"We should all take teaching and learning more seriously."
—A Hope High School student

"The schools must have higher expectations for their students, academically and socially. It is too easy to assume they 'can't do any better.'"
—An elementary school teacher

What did we learn? It is no easy task to summarize. Our survey data alone are well in excess of 20,000 pages. Yet after more than a year of research, debate, and thought, we believe that many of our findings can be discussed—and most of our recommendations can be understood—if we look at 10 key issues:

1. communication and interpersonal relationships,
2. diversity,
3. passive and active learning,
4. differences between elementary schools and secondary schools,
5. differences in students' perceptions of high schools,
6. equality of opportunity for students,
7. professional development,
8. evaluation and accountability,
9. revenues and expenditures, and
10. data and self-knowledge.

"I don't think my children work to their potential. This is not the teacher's fault. I think the educational system needs an overhaul."
—A parent of a high school student

Each of the recommendations in this report addresses at least one of these issues. We believe wholeheartedly that if clear progress is made in all of these areas, Providence will earn a place among the best urban districts in the United States.

Key Issue 1. Communication and Interpersonal Relationships

"We never get a chance to talk," and "they never listen to us," are the two comments we heard most often as we listened to Providence's teachers, students, parents, principals, and administrators. The "we's" and the "they's" changed depending on who was speaking, but the message was always the same: poor communication poisons relationships and cripples Providence schools. No matter whom we talked with, a clear majority felt that their knowledge and talents are being wasted because no one takes the time to listen.

"Central administration talks; we listen. It should be the other way around."
—An elementary school teacher

"One of the major frustrations of teachers who care is that we are never allowed to voice our opinions in a forum that matters. Our opinions and advice are never sought by administration. We are rarely, if ever, included in decision-making. And we are represented by a union whose philosophy we don't often share."
—A high school teacher

"The teachers contract is the chief obstacle [to communication]. Even when a meeting can be scheduled during the day, the entire faculty is not present because teachers still take their unassigned period."
—A middle school principal

"The principals have been considerate in hearing my concerns, and I do believe try sincerely to solve the problems they are faced with. Some need to be stronger leaders."
—A parent of a middle school student

Teachers report that they seldom have the chance to talk with their colleagues. Their days are full, lunch is limited to 20 minutes of fast eating, and faculty meetings are rare and short. On surveys, teachers wrote that they seldom share their successes or their problems with anyone. Many express a profound sense of professional isolation and alienation. Another major frustration is their belief that administrators, particularly central administrators, do not listen to their concerns or ask for their input. Teachers say, "They talk; we listen."

Students offer a mixed view of their relationships with teachers. In focus groups and surveys, some students recall with admiration and excitement teachers who talk with them individually and show respect for them and interest in their lives. One of the most positive pieces of data we uncovered is that 83% of all high school students feel that there is at least one person at their school to whom they can go for help.

Yet many students express deep frustration that many of their teachers do not respect them or take a personal interest in their lives. Forty-six percent of the students say that none or only a few of their teachers care about them as people. Twenty-three percent say that none or only a few listen to what they have to say. When asked what they would most like to improve in their school, students noted that they would like to make the teachers care more about them as people and spend more time talking with them one-on-one. Students also want to have more input in their education; they have many suggestions about how to improve their schools and make their education more challenging and effective but note that they are seldom given opportunities to offer their ideas.

Principals are dissatisfied with their opportunities to communicate with their teachers and with central administrators. Seventy-six percent of the principals are dissatisfied with their ability to meet with their staffs. Indeed, by their own estimate, principals report that during the course of a year, they meet with their teachers, on average, four times a year for a total of 150 minutes. Thus, principals and teachers almost never set goals for their building or talk about teaching. Most principals blame the frenetic pace of the average school day and the restrictions that the Teachers Union contract places on after-school meetings. Principals are equally unhappy about their lack of opportunities to meet with each other or with the central administration. They report that the monthly meetings for principals are dominated by central administrators who discuss administrivia and not the real concerns of the principals.

Parents offer what was to PROBE a surprisingly positive view of the communication and relationships that they have with the schools. Seventy percent say that they get enough information about their children's progress from the teacher. Seventy-one percent agree with the statements, "Teachers listen to me," and "Teachers respect me." Nevertheless, most parents want even more contact with teachers and even more information, particularly about homework policy, absences, discipline policy, and ways that parents can be involved in the schools.

Consistent with national research, we found much lower percentages of satisfied parents in middle schools and high schools. Whereas 83% of parents of elementary school children feel that they get enough information about their children's progress, only 53% of parents of high school students agree. We found significant differences among ethnic groups. Hispanic and Asian parents are much less likely to believe that they have adequate communication with the schools and teachers.

The problem of inadequate communication is most pronounced with central administrators and the School Board. The second tier of administrators, including the program developers,

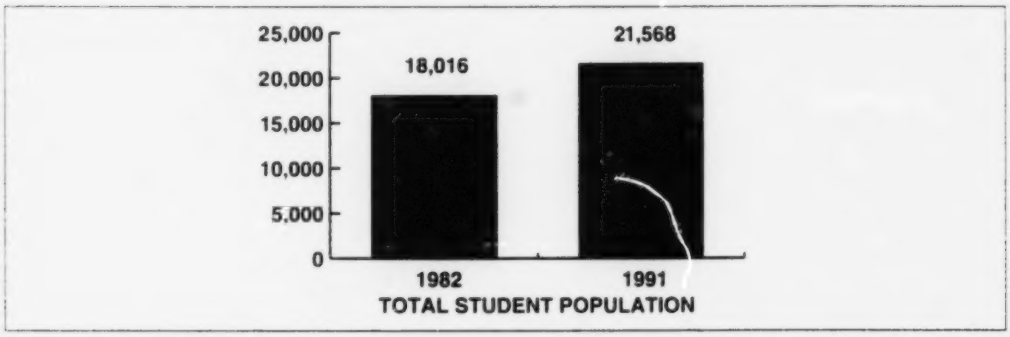
complain about how difficult it is to talk with their supervisors (usually assistant superintendents). The second tier bristles when they recount how they are asked at staff meetings to summarize, in three minutes or less, their work for the month. Similarly, School Board members acknowledge that their relationship and communication with the central administration is poor. A profound lack of trust hinders any decision making. All parties agree that if the school system is going to achieve excellence, these relationships must change.

"My high school is like a second home. The people and teachers here make you feel welcome. They will help you out and do anything for you."
—An ALP student

Key Issue 2. Diversity

The student population of Providence schools has experienced major change during the last decade. The total population has grown by nearly 20% (see Figure 3.1).

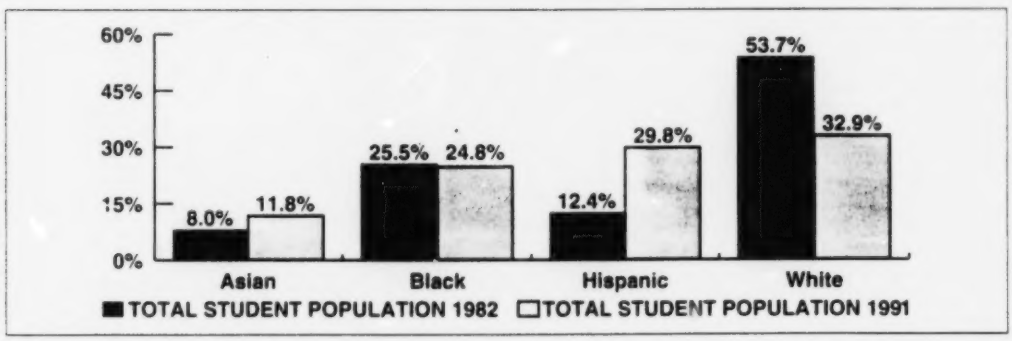
FIGURE 3.1
TOTAL STUDENT POPULATION



The racial/ethnic mix of the student population has also changed dramatically. While the population of black students has remained relatively stable, the white population has decreased by almost 45%. The population of Asian students has increased by 45%, and the Hispanic population has increased by 135% (see Figure 3.2).

"Everyone likes each other! They don't care what race you are!!!!!"
—A Hope High School student

FIGURE 3.2
PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL STUDENT POPULATION BY RACE/ETHNICITY



"[What I like best about my child's school is that] there is a great deal of cultural diversity—a microcosm of the real world our children will face—opportunities to learn about other cultures."
—A parent of a high school student

"[What] I like best about the school that my child attends is the ethnic and cultural mix. I feel it is a benefit to our community to have such a mix."
—A parent of a student of unknown level

"Ethnic diversity is what makes teaching in Providence a rewarding life's work."
—A middle school teacher

"Our racial and ethnic diversity is the backbone of our program."
—A high school teacher

"[I like best] the diversity of the students. I think we learn from each other rather than in the classroom to an extent. The knowledge we get from each other helps make the learning easier and you get more out of it."
—A Central High School student

The School Department estimates that in the homes of Providence students more than 80 different languages and dialects are spoken. Indeed, compared to the other midsized American cities PROBE examined, Providence is the only district in which at least 10% of the students are from one of four different racial/ethnic groups: Asian, black, Hispanic, and white. Most cities have only two major racial/ethnic populations.

Given the dramatic changes in the racial/ethnic composition of the student body as well as growing racial conflict in the United States during the last 10 years, a high level of tension might have been expected among the different racial/ethnic populations in Providence schools. PROBE did not find such tension. In fact, the wide diversity proved to be a point of pride and enthusiasm in the minds of students, parents, and teachers. Again and again, they cite this diversity as a strength and, often, the single best attribute of the schools.

Seventy percent of high school students believe that they get along well with each other and benefit from the system's diversity. Sixty-one percent say that students of different racial/ethnic origins get along well in their school. Indeed, many students say that what they like most about school is the quality of this relationship. Students commonly point out that they have friends from different racial/ethnic groups. At Central High School, a Cambodian girl excitedly reports that her Dominican friend is teaching her Spanish. At Hope High School, a white girl matter-of-factly states that most of her friends are black. Students at almost all of the schools surveyed feel they learn more and are better prepared for the future because of the diversity among their classmates.

Providence parents look favorably on the diversity of the students. Parents say that diversity is what they like best about their children's schools. Many claim that they keep their children in Providence schools because of that diversity and their belief that the multicultural student population gives their children a better education and better preparation for the future.

Teachers, too, value the diversity of the student population. Seventy-eight percent agree that it is an asset. Many teachers add comments about the benefits of diversity, and several say that they choose to teach in Providence because of it. More than one-half (52%) add that they need help in capitalizing on this opportunity. Many plead for instruction in the cultures and the learning styles of the students they teach.

While the students' racial/ethnic diversity provides rich opportunities for learning, their economic diversity, specifically the large population of children from impoverished families, poses many challenges to the schools. More than one-half of all students in Providence schools are eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch because their family income is at or below the poverty level. The greatest concern of many teachers is the almost overwhelming social needs of many of their students. We heard repeatedly about their grave problems and profound needs. Seventy percent of the teachers believe that "most of their students" have very difficult family lives. Fifty-two percent believe that most of their students have low self-esteem. Only 18% believe that the social services needs of their students are being met. Many teachers are frustrated because so much of their teaching time is spent addressing and reacting to the social problems of their students. Most teachers accept this as a reality of their job.

Key Issue 3. Passive and Active Learning

"I wish there would be less lecturing. The teachers don't really believe in letting us think for ourselves. They focus on having us memorize their ideas. We need more independent projects."

—A Classical High School student

The 21st century will require adults who can solve problems, manage enormous amounts of information, articulate ideas, and work independently as well as in teams. Education must reflect this impending reality. Thus, PROBE was disturbed to learn what Providence high school students report happens often in most of their classes:

- 63% say the teachers talk all the time,
- 50% say teachers rely heavily on memorization,
- 48% say they read sections of a textbook and then answer questions in the back of the book, and
- 35% say they answer questions on ditto sheets.

We heard many complaints about boring, passive classes and the lack of opportunities for students to express their points of view. Students also complain that they have few opportunities to learn from the adults in their community or visit businesses or historical or cultural landmarks. Students report that guest speakers rarely come into their classes, and students seldom go on field trips. Many students feel contained—but not challenged—by their schools.

"I'd like to work on other things besides the book and dittos. I'd like to have fun learning sometimes."

—A Mt. Pleasant High School student

We are encouraged by the number who say that they want to be engaged in their learning and want more challenge. Sixty-four percent of high school students believe they can handle more challenging work. Large percentages of students say they want to get involved in active learning—work on projects with other students, explore ideas that interest them, interview adults with expertise in a field, conduct research that allows them to develop and express their own viewpoints, and report to fellow students what they have learned. Most students do not want to avoid work, rather they want to do focused, intense, and collaborative work.

"Cooperative teams are fostering a love of learning with seventh graders. Not only do they work well together but the teams are motivated, helpful and even discipline one another with peer pressure."

—A middle school teacher

Like most of their students, most teachers want to increase the opportunities for active learning. Sixty percent would like to increase the frequency that students work in small groups or engage in cooperative learning. Fifty-six percent would like to have their students visit the community more often, including going on more field trips. (Many note that there is not adequate funding to allow for this.) Just under one-half want to talk more frequently with their students about real life applications of what they are studying. Professional development is desperately needed to help teachers achieve these goals. The convergence of what teachers and students want can serve as a powerful catalyst for the transformation of the quality of schools.

"Instead of the teacher always teaching, I would like to get up and explain how I see things, because sometimes your peers will understand you better."

—A Hope High School student

Key Issue 4. Differences between Elementary Schools and Secondary Schools

We were impressed by the quality within the city's elementary schools and much less impressed by the city's middle schools and high schools.

PROBE's research disclosed good news from the city's elementary schools. Although we are exceedingly wary of using standardized test scores to measure quality, we must note that over the last decade the average percentile score of Providence elementary school students on the overall basic battery score for the MAT test has steadily risen (see Table 3.1).

"The quality of education improves every year. Teachers cooperate and share ideas. They put their all into their jobs."
—An elementary school principal

"All the teachers I have met in Providence are extremely dedicated to their students: they want the best for their students and go out of their way to provide it as best they can."
—An elementary school teacher

"No school could have a harder working faculty."
—An elementary school teacher

TABLE 3.1
COMPARISON OF AVERAGE MAT PERCENTILES BY GRADE

This improvement is especially noteworthy considering that the schools have enrolled a significantly larger number of non–English-speaking Southeast Asian and Hispanic students while steadily losing white students who generally score higher on standardized tests.

Several other indicators attest to quality in the elementary schools. Over the last five years, attendance in the elementary schools has improved—in some cases quite significantly—in 20 of 21 elementary schools. (The one exception, Asa Messer Elementary School, has the highest attendance percentage of all schools and the decline is less than a point.) Seventeen of the 21 elementary schools have student attendance better than 92%. Elementary school teachers miss far fewer days than middle school and high school teachers.

Perhaps most impressive of all are the perceptions and beliefs of the principals, teachers, and parents involved in the elementary schools. All (100%) of elementary school principals believe that students in their schools receive an excellent or good education, are satisfied with the quality of teaching in their schools, and are satisfied with the willingness of their teachers to try new methods and approaches.

Eighty percent of elementary school teachers believe that their students receive an excellent or good education. Elementary school teachers commonly praise the system's new literacy curriculum, the cooperative integrated reading and composition (CIRC) program, and the at-risk teams that provide counseling and social services at seven elementary schools. Elementary school teachers, however, also raise concerns about their schools. Most teachers are dissatisfied with opportunities for communicating with colleagues and their principals. Many feel that they receive little feedback about their teaching skills and that they receive inadequate professional development. They struggle with the racial/ethnic diversity of the student population and the large differences in student ability.

Large majorities of parents of elementary school students are satisfied with the teachers' abilities to draw out their children's personal strengths and to help children feel good about themselves, as well as the quality of education, the challenge offered to students, the amount of communication they have with the school, and numerous other indicators. In all of the indicators cited above, and with many others, the parents of elementary school students are significantly more satisfied than the parents of middle school and high school students.

PROBE found many positive signs to report about the system's elementary schools, but we also found many causes for concern in the system's middle schools and high schools. Indeed, just about every item we found to be positive in elementary schools, we found to be much less positive at the upper levels.

Over the last half of the 1980s, the average percentile score of middle school and high school students on the overall basic battery score for the MAT has either fallen or shown little improvement. More important, the mean percentile of eighth graders (39) is *below* the mean percentile of fifth graders (45). In essence, then, the average percentile increases as students progress through elementary schools, then *drops* as students go through the middle schools.

That the 10th grade score (45) is no higher than the fifth grade score (45) is particularly disconcerting because by the 10th grade many low achievers have dropped out of school.

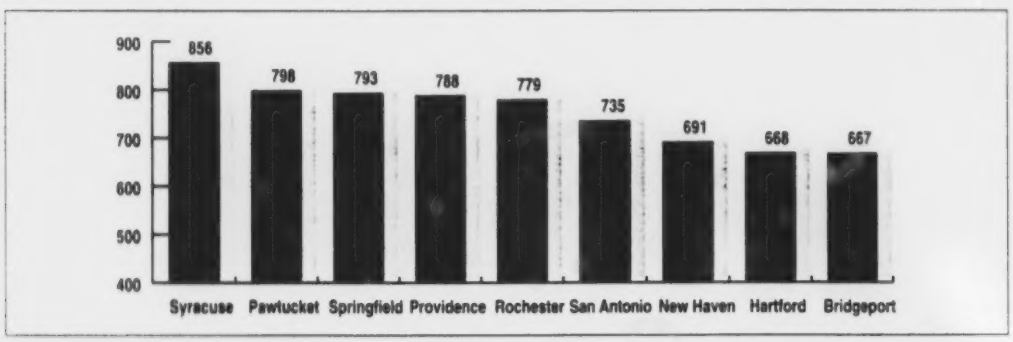
Attendance figures are equally problematic. Whereas the average elementary school boasts student attendance above 92%, the average middle school is below 88%, and the average high school is below 84% (and below 80% for the three "comprehensive" high schools: Central, Hope, and Mt. Pleasant). Teacher attendance at middle schools and high schools is also lower than that at elementary schools.

SAT scores have dropped a total of 54 points over the last five years, from 842 to 788. Nevertheless, Providence's SAT score is still slightly above that of other comparable urban districts (see Figure 3.3). Additionally, more Providence students, on average, took the SAT than did students in these cities.

"I like the education my child is receiving. I only wish that the Providence middle schools and high schools offered the same structure in education and discipline. I fear that when my child is finished with elementary school I will be forced to send my child to a private or parochial school because of the lack of education, discipline, and caring of teachers, administrators, and fellow students."

—A parent of an elementary school student

FIGURE 3.3
COMPARISON OF COMBINED 1991 SAT PERCENTILES FOR COMPARABLE URBAN DISTRICTS



PROBE found positive and negative data about the system's dropout rate. Using reliable data, we can safely conclude that the city's dropout rate has fallen steadily over the last half of the 1980s from the low 40s to the low 30s. While this clearly is a positive achievement, the 1991–92 dropout rate of 31.9% is still higher than the rate of most urban districts.

"One change I would make would be to have classes and teachers that challenge us to do our best."

—A Mt. Pleasant High School student

Perceptions of middle school and high school principals, teachers, parents, and students are mixed at best. Whereas 100% of elementary school principals believe that their students receive a good or excellent education, only 71% of secondary school principals believe this. Whereas 100% of elementary school principals are satisfied with the quality of teaching in their schools, only 68% of secondary school principals are satisfied. Whereas 100% of elementary school principals are satisfied with the willingness of their teachers to try new methods, only 38% of secondary school principals are satisfied.

As with the principals, secondary school teachers are far less positive about their schools. For example, whereas 80% of elementary school teachers believe that their students receive a good or excellent education, only 55% of middle school and 47% of high school teachers believe this. Parents with students in middle schools and high schools are far less satisfied than parents with students in elementary schools on a range of issues that include quality of education, amount of educational challenge, relationship with teachers and principals, and amount of communication.

"Have the faculty respect the students."

—A Classical High School student

"The thing I like best is that my guidance counselor is worried about each and every student who shows interest. He wants all his students to get the best and is always encouraging students to go on to college."
—A Hope High School student

Students are cited often as the best indicators of the health of schools, and the information PROBE obtained from middle school and high school students raise many significant concerns. While many of these students express great appreciation and respect for teachers who challenge them and treat them with respect, most students believe that they are not adequately challenged or treated with enough dignity. A few figures substantiate this:

- 64% of all students believe they could handle more challenging work,
- 59% do less than five hours of homework a week, and
- 66% say that in most of their classes, the teachers do all the talking.

Students repeatedly voice their desire for more challenge and more personal relationships with their teachers.

"I wish there were more discussions; independent research would encourage students to think for themselves and not be told the facts but discover them."
—A Classical High School student

Key Issue 5. Differences in Students' Perceptions of High Schools

PROBE found many statistically significant differences in students' perceptions of high schools. Because so many differences were pronounced, we believe these data reveal important information about the climate, teaching, and leadership of these five schools.

PROBE asked students several questions about the environment of their school. Students at the Alternate Learning Project (ALP) and at Hope High School are most likely to feel that their school is clean and safe, that they understand their school's rules, and that their teachers are in control of their classes. In all of these categories, Classical High School and Central High School students gave their schools lower grades than ALP and Hope students rated their schools, but above the ratings of the students at Mt. Pleasant High School. Mt. Pleasant students are least likely to feel safe in their school, to say that they understand their school's rules, and to believe that their teachers are in control of their classes.

"I love the way the teachers teach and also the freedom we get. The best thing I really like is that ALP is not just a high school. We're a family. We listen to what each other has to say."
—An ALP student

Students at ALP and Hope are most likely to believe that their principal responds to student concerns, that their guidance counselor shows interest in them, and that their teachers like them as well as take an interest in them personally, expect them to do good work, and encourage them to go to college. In all these categories, Classical and Central students rated their schools below ALP and Hope students, but above the ratings that Mt. Pleasant students gave their school. Mt. Pleasant ratings were lowest in all of these categories.

"I wish they would change most of the teachers that just give work and don't explain how to do it."
—A Mt. Pleasant High School student

PROBE asked students several questions about what they did in their classes. In general, Classical students gave their school the lowest ratings to most of our questions. According to the survey, Classical students are least likely to work with other students on a project, to study what interests them, to have teachers who keep their interest in class, to hear outside speakers, and to go on field trips. Hope students, on the other hand, are much more positive about their classes and are most likely to believe that they are able to study topics of concern, that their teachers keep their interest in class, that they work on projects with other students, and that their teachers make them feel all right to ask questions when they do not understand. ALP students generally gave their classes ratings second only to Hope. Mt. Pleasant students indicate that they are most likely to do ditto sheets in class and to feel that their teachers do not encourage them to ask questions when they don't understand.

PROBE also asked students to answer some questions about their feelings toward their school. ALP and Hope students are most likely to say that they like school. Classical and Mt. Pleasant students are the least likely. Classical and ALP students are most likely to believe that their school has a good reputation in Providence. Mt. Pleasant and Central students are least likely to believe this.

Key Issue 6. Equality of Opportunity for Students

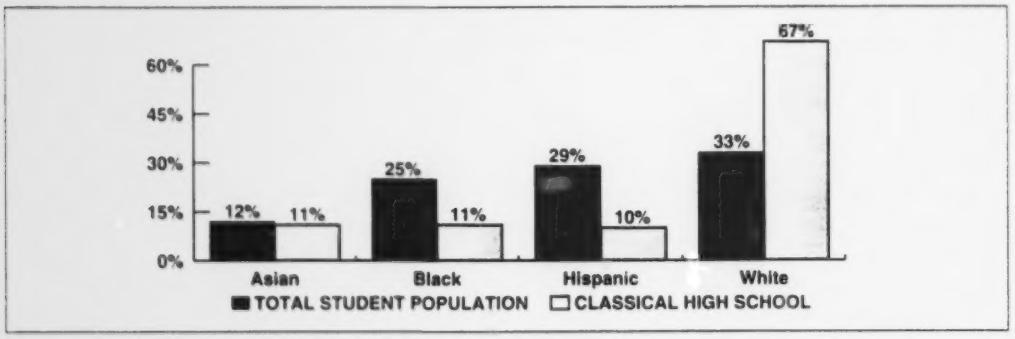
PROBE's research reveals cause for concern about educational equity, particularly the equity of opportunity for Asian, black, and Hispanic students, and students enrolled in special education classes, as well as classes for students with limited English-speaking ability.

Our data show that white children comprise one-third of the school population and two-thirds of the enrollment in the city's most rigorous academic programs. Asian, black, and Hispanic children are often underrepresented. At Classical High School, white students obviously outnumber black and Hispanic students (see Figure 3.4).

"Learning to me should be work, but also it should be fun to learn."
—A Central High School student

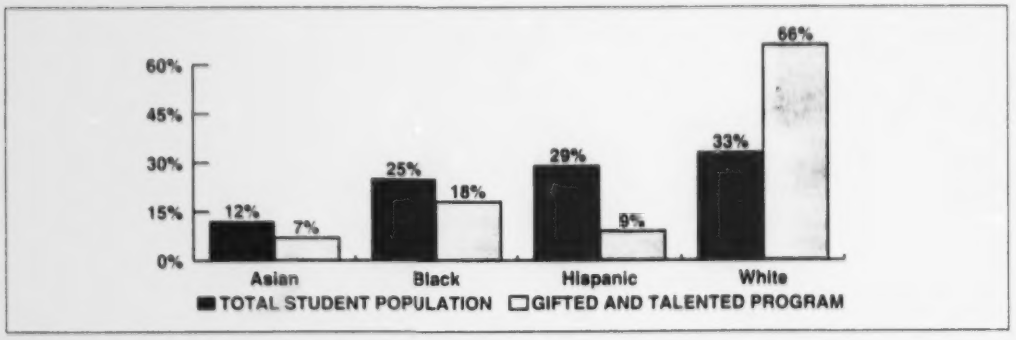
"I would like to see a closer relationship between teachers and parents to give us guidance in how we can help our children and to let us know in our own language *what is good or bad, progress or no progress in our children...that way, they would understand us better on how to work to better our children's educations."*
—A Hispanic parent of a High School student

FIGURE 3.4
COMPARISON OF 1991–92 RACIAL/ETHNIC MIX OF TOTAL STUDENT POPULATION AND CLASSICAL HIGH SCHOOL



In the system's program for gifted and talented students, white children are also in the majority. Asian, black, and Hispanic students together represent a clear minority (see Figure 3.5).

FIGURE 3.5
COMPARISON OF 1991–92 RACIAL/ETHNIC MIX OF TOTAL STUDENT POPULATION AND GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAM STUDENTS



In addition to the inequity apparent in these enrollment figures, slightly more than one-third of high school students (38%) believe that teachers make "unfair judgments" based on their appearance. Black and Hispanic students at Classical High School and Mt. Pleasant High School mention feeling that they are treated unfairly by their teachers because of their race/ethnicity.

"Classical is the best high school in Providence. The work is challenging for me. The things I do here I think will make me a better person and hopefully a better student."
—A Classical High School student

"This school is two schools in one—the gifted school and 'the other kids.' There is great education going on in the gifted school and great problems in the other."
—A teacher from Greene Middle School

"I feel that there is a lot of prejudice coming from teachers. I also believe that they do not expect kids from other cultures to do well."
—An elementary school teacher

"The answer [to the question 'Do you need help in capitalizing on student diversity?'] ought to be obvious. But try to find the time to take a course, prepare lessons, correct papers, and fulfill course requirements for training. Oops, forgot my family. I've had to drop a class midway through. Ouch."
—A high school teacher

Only one-half of the parents surveyed believe that students of different backgrounds are treated equally in their children's school. (Nonwhite parents are no more or less likely than white parents to feel that children are treated unequally.)

Some teachers also express concern. In unsolicited comments, these teachers say that some of their colleagues are insensitive or racist. Many teachers believe that sensitivity and multicultural training is needed badly.

PROBE's research raises troubling questions about the equity of opportunity offered to children with special needs. The sorry history of Providence's special education program is detailed in the recommendation portion of this report. Nevertheless, we note here that the U.S. Department of Education and the R.I. Department of Education have both issued stinging reports about the inadequacy of Providence's program and have twice threatened to withhold funding until improvements are made. As with the federal and state governments, PROBE also uncovered negative data from parents, teachers, principals, and administrators. In the last few months, the School Department has developed an extensive—and expensive—plan to rebuild special education. Acceptable improvement awaits measurement.

PROBE's research also calls into question the equality of opportunity for children with limited proficiency in English. Providence's Limited English Proficiency (LEP) program was criticized by parents, teachers, and administrators. Many parents feel that their children are not mainstreamed quickly enough, while "regular" classroom teachers feel that LEP students are inadequately prepared when they are mainstreamed. Specialists in the R.I. Department of Education cite poor test scores as evidence of the program's inadequacy. Again, changes have been instituted, but it is too early to tell if progress has been made.

Finally, PROBE's research points out troubling differences in resources and materials available at different schools. On the positive side, our preliminary examination of funds available to each school shows that, in fact, the schools with the largest population of students from low-income families receive more dollars per pupil than other schools, in most part because federal and state programs provide additional funds to economically disadvantaged students. Nevertheless, when we asked high school students if they had enough books for their classes, 6% of Classical students answered no, while 32% of Hope students and 29% of Central students said no.

According to our survey of parents organizations, the parents of students at Central High School raised $500 last year, while parents of students at Martin Luther King School raised $14,000. On a per-pupil basis, parents of King School students raised 50 times what parents of students at Central raised. Walking through the hallways of Sackett Street Elementary School and Veazie Street Elementary School or Classical High School and Central High School, one notes the inequity in facilities.

Key Issue 7. Professional Development

With the student population changing rapidly and the functions of education being redefined, professional development is critical to the success of any educational system. Unfortunately, PROBE found widespread dissatisfaction in Providence among most of those who need and want professional training.

The inadequacy of professional development can in part be attributed to the failure of all concerned—the School Board, Providence Teachers Union, central administration, principals, teachers, *and* the City Council—to give a high priority to the continuing education of everyone involved in the schools. Although almost 80% of the entire School Department budget is spent on personnel, less than one-tenth of 1% is spent on developing and reinforcing professional skills.

School Board members receive no training. After earning the approval of the Mayor and the City Council, School Board members abruptly find themselves responsible for a $120-million business without having the benefit of a single training session. The first few months are, according to all members, "trial by fire." Even after they learn the ropes, School Board members do not attend regional or national meetings of school boards; in fact, they do not even attend the meetings of the R.I. School Board Association because, to save the $11,000 fee, Providence is not a member. One of the most disconcerting exchanges in all PROBE's research came from a School Board member who, when asked where the School Board receives its guidance on policy issues, answered, "Nowhere."

"This is the most footloose, free-lancing Board I've ever been associated with."

—A School Board member

Providence's principals receive little more guidance. Eighty-six percent feel that their training is ineffective. Before being appointed, a principal undergoes no formal training. After being appointed, a principal rarely meets with other principals to discuss common problems, nor does a principal benefit from a professional mentor. Indeed, at the end of each of PROBE's focus groups with building administrators, participants remarked how they wished that they could meet again to discuss problems and solutions.

"I wish they would in-service principals. Have meaningful workshops that address day-to-day operations of a school. Bring in real people not highly paid consultants who just add the Providence experience to their vita."

—A middle school principal

A large majority of teachers are dissatisfied with the in-service training that they receive. Only 26% feel that the current professional training they receive meets their needs. To an open-ended question about the quality of staff development, more than two dozen teachers ignored five suggested responses and penned in the same answer: "What staff development?"

"Training is not a regular or planned part of the school culture."

—A high school teacher

Other teachers offered longer and more strident comments about the irrelevance of the professional development seminars they must attend and the naivete of the "outside experts" who tell them how to teach without ever having taught in an urban classroom. A clear majority of teachers believes that teachers should be involved in planning and presenting training for the teachers in their own school.

"Release time workshops are mostly nearly useless."

—A middle school teacher

Key Issue 8. Evaluation and Accountability

People in all areas of the system do not receive adequate evaluation or coaching. The School Board takes part in no internal or external evaluation. For more than a decade, central administrators have not been evaluated formally. Almost one-third of all teachers report that during the 1991–92 school year no one—no administrator or fellow teacher—visited their classroom to evaluate them or just to give some reaction to their teaching.

"We need training on classroom management by good classroom teachers, not so-called experts not presently or recently in a classroom."

—An elementary school teacher

PROBE found that this lack of evaluation hurts morale and limits the opportunities for improvement. Many teachers told us they had not been evaluated in years—five years, 10 years, some even claimed 20 years. The lack of evaluation not only makes teachers wonder if anybody cares about their work, it profoundly limits their opportunity to improve. Teachers feel they live and work in isolation, and they do not know how good they are or how much better they could become.

Without evaluation and support for professional development, central administrators also feel overwhelmed by their many responsibilities. Without evaluation, the School Board fails to address the fact that it is not meeting its basic responsibility to set goals and priorities for the system.

"No one visited my class for the past five years."
—A middle school teacher

"This year is the first time in 21 years that central administration has ever acknowledged my efforts and those of my students."
—A middle school teacher

"No one visited my class this year, except students from Brown. I received an excellent evaluation from the administration."
—A high school teacher

"Evaluation is hardly ever done. That's why we have such a poor school."
—A high school teacher

"Classroom teachers rarely hear much praise."
—An elementary school teacher

"Lack of feedback is why teachers have an 'I don't care' attitude."
—An elementary school teacher

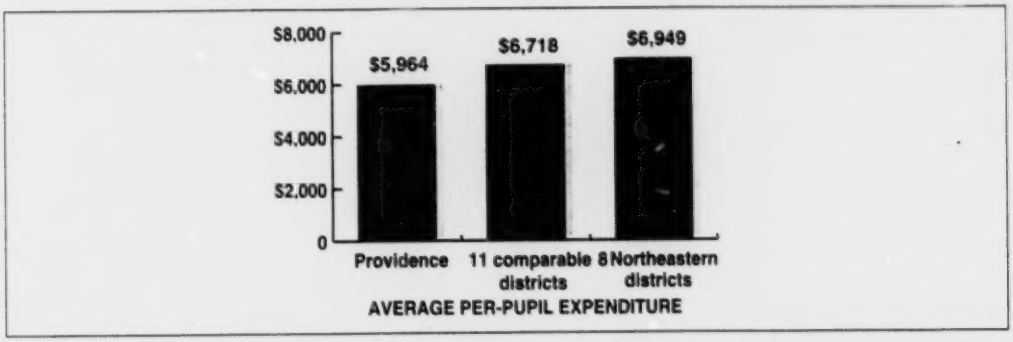
The lack of evaluation also allows incompetence to go unaddressed and excellence to go unrecognized. Eighty-nine percent of Providence teachers believe that incompetence is not addressed and 91% believe that excellence is not recognized. Principals unanimously agree. Comments about incompetence and excellence are lengthy and angry. Most feel that incompetent teachers are a black eye to the entire system and an insult to the majority of teachers who work hard and are effective—and are never recognized. Teachers and principals believe that the Teachers Union and the administration must work together to address both issues.

Key Issue 9. Revenues and Expenditures

In Providence, a commonly held belief is that the school system is adequately funded; some believe even overfunded. A popular assumption is that a disproportionate amount of funds is spent on a bloated administration while teachers are paid less than their counterparts in comparable urban districts. PROBE's research contradicts each of these views.

PROBE compared Providence's expenditures with those of 11 other urban districts, eight of which are in the Northeast and all of which have student populations comparable in size, racial/ethnic diversity, and socioeconomic status. On average, Providence schools spend fewer dollars educating students than these other districts. In fact, Providence spends roughly $750 less than the average of the other 11 districts and almost $1,000 less than the average of the eight Northeastern districts (see Figure 3.6).

FIGURE 3.6
COMPARISON OF 1991–92 AVERAGE PER-PUPIL EXPENDITURE BY DISTRICT



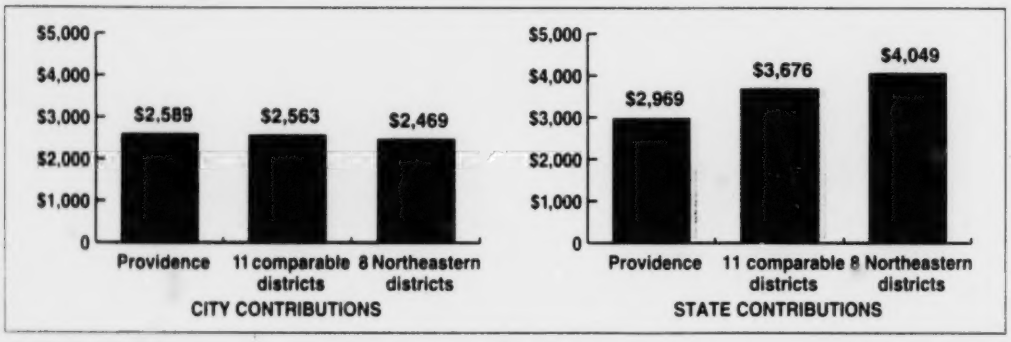
The relatively low per-pupil spending is most apparent in several areas, especially professional development, data collection, and books and materials. More than one-half of all Providence teachers report that they do not have enough books for their classes; more than one-half say that they also do not have enough materials—pencils, paper, workbooks. Many teachers told us that every year they personally pay for some of the materials that they use in their classes.

Providence taxpayers will be satisfied to learn that the other districts' additional funding come almost entirely from their respective state governments. Providence taxpayers pay as many dollars, per pupil, as the taxpayers in the other cities. The other cities spend more money because their state

governments contribute more to the education of their urban students than Rhode Island contributes to the education of Providence's youth (see Figure 3.7).

"We need more basic materials. I am tired of buying pencils for the children."
—An elementary school teacher

FIGURE 3.7
COMPARISON OF AVERAGE DOLLARS CONTRIBUTED BY CITY AND STATE GOVERNMENTS

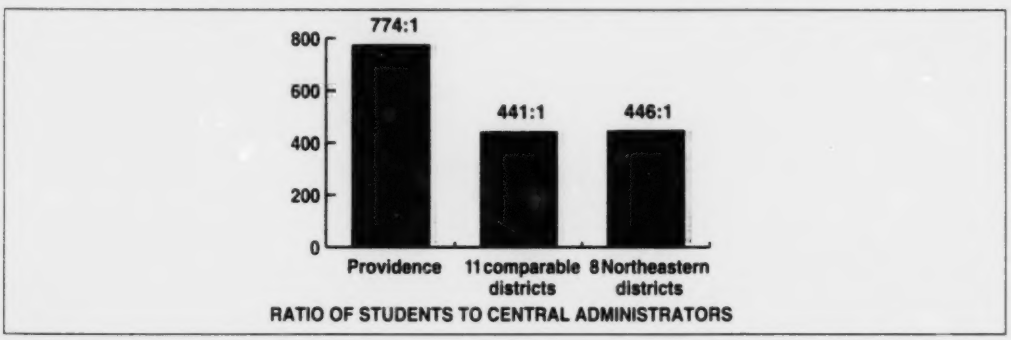


"All materials I use in class are brought in from outside (personal property or public library)."
—A middle school teacher

What may surprise the community even more is that Providence, at least by comparison with other urban districts, does not have a bloated central administration. Using comparable and reliable definitions of administrator, PROBE found Providence to have, in fact, fewer central administrators per pupil than the average of the 11 comparable districts and the average of the eight Northeastern districts (see Figure 3.8).

"I have 50 books to teach 1,000 students a year."
—A high school health teacher

FIGURE 3.8
COMPARISON OF 1991–92 RATIO OF STUDENTS TO CENTRAL ADMINISTRATORS



"We have no transportation funds. When studying Colonial life, we have to pay for the bus ($279) to go to Salem. Poorer students must stay at school."
—A high school teacher

PROBE also found that the system's ratio of building administrators (principals and assistant principals) is higher than the average of the 11 comparable districts and the average of the eight Northeastern districts (see Figure 3.9).

PROBE used reliable and comparable definitions of building and central administrators and conducted spot checks of data in each district. Our conclusion is that at both building level and central administration level, Providence has fewer administrators than comparable districts.

During the last few years, the media have carried reports that Providence teachers are the lowest paid in the state. These figures are based on comparisons of the salaries of first-year and 10th-

"In 21 years in the system, I have received three written evaluations. Two of them were my first year and the other was based on a ten minute visit. The principal came to my room with the PROBE group and said parents were pleased. How would he know??? He never visits the class or discusses curriculum with me. This was just for show and it made me angry. I feel I teach in a vacuum most of the time."

—A middle school teacher

"I feel as though I teach in Rhode Island and that my central administration could operate from Topeka, Kansas, for all the time they spend with their teachers."

—An elementary school teacher

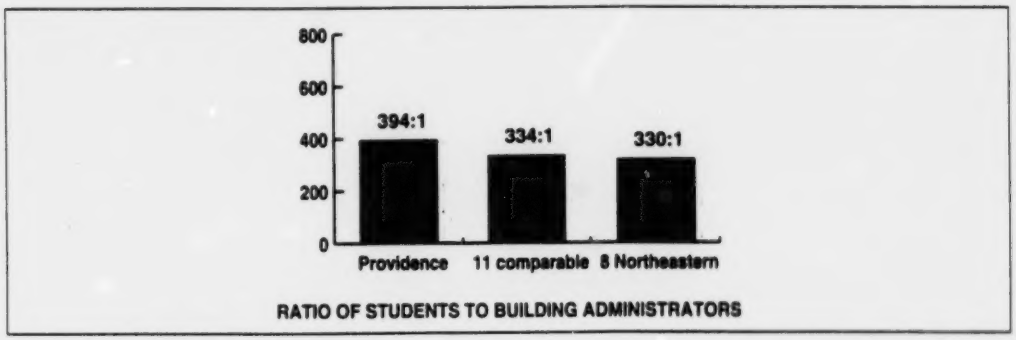
"Our responsibilities continue to increase but nothing is ever taken away."

—An elementary school principal

"I don't feel central administration would ever want to talk with me."

—An elementary school teacher

FIGURE 3.9
COMPARISON OF 1991–92 RATIO OF STUDENTS TO BUILDING ADMINISTRATORS



year teachers. These figures do not, however, take into account that Providence teachers are also compensated for additional schooling, seniority beyond 10 years, and numerous other jobs that teachers agree to perform. Consequently, in Providence, the average teacher's salary is almost $2,000 above the "top" salary on the salary scale.

Compared with teachers in comparable urban districts, Providence teachers do quite well. The average teacher salary in Providence is more than $2,000 higher than the average of all the other districts and Providence's average salary is more than $500 higher than the average for the seven Northeastern districts we compared. (Data are unavailable for Pawtucket.) This is true despite the fact that Providence teachers have, on average, less seniority and fewer master's degrees than teachers in other districts (see Table 3.2).

TABLE 3.2
COMPARISON OF 1991–92 AVERAGE TEACHERS' SALARY, YEARS TEACHING, AND NUMBER OF MASTER'S DEGREES HELD BY DISTRICT

	PROVIDENCE	10 COMPARABLE DISTRICTS*	7 NORTHEASTERN DISTRICTS*
Average salary	$41,893	$39,491	$41,347
Average years experience	12.9	14.5	14.0
Percent with master's degree	39%	56%	60%

*Data unavailable for Pawtucket.

This is also true despite the fact that Providence has the shortest school day and the shortest school year of the seven comparable districts that shared their data: Bridgeport, Dayton, New Haven, Pawtucket, Pittsburgh, Rochester, and Syracuse. In all cases, Providence elementary school and high school students are in school fewer hours than their counterparts in other cities (see Table 3.3).

These hours add up to weeks of schooltime each year. Pittsburgh elementary school students are in school three and one-half weeks more than Providence students. Rochester high school students are in school four weeks more than Providence students.

Providence teachers are also required to be in their school building fewer hours than teachers in all districts except Pawtucket (see Table 3.4).

All of the districts above conduct classes 180 days per year; however, the districts listed above (except for Pawtucket and Providence) expect teachers to come to work, on average, 186.5 days (180 teaching days, 6.5 planning days). Providence and Pawtucket have 181 work days (180 teaching days, one planning day).

Compared to the other 11 districts, Providence central administrators, principals, and teachers have the most liberal benefits packages. Only Providence and Pawtucket offer full family coverage for health, prescription, chiropractic, vision, and dental care. Providence also offers its professional employees the largest number of sick leave days, 20; the average of eight Northeastern districts that shared this data is 13.4 days.

"There is never enough time."
—An elementary school teacher

"We need more time."
—An elementary school principal

"[What are the barriers to communication?] Time! Time! Time!"
—A middle school principal

"There is no time during the day. Released times are set aside for other things and only the Union provides one day a year to even exchange pleasantries with other teachers."
—An elementary school teacher

"At Hope, we have a planning period now in the 8:15 to 8:45 time period...it is wonderful. We feel human and are getting to know each other."
—A Hope High School teacher

"[We need] full day meetings for staff development, school business. Perhaps the number of school days for teachers should be increased."
—A middle school teacher

TABLE 3.3
COMPARISON OF HOURS STUDENTS SPEND IN SCHOOL PER YEAR BY DISTRICT

DISTRICT	NUMBER OF HOURS GREATER THAN PROVIDENCE	
	HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS	ELEMENTARY STUDENTS
Rochester	144 hours	87 hours
Syracuse	141	45
Dayton	133	77
Bridgeport	117	75
Pittsburgh	117	105
New Haven	102	45
Pawtucket	87	60
Providence	0	0

TABLE 3.4
COMPARISON OF HOURS REQUIRED FOR TEACHERS TO BE IN SCHOOL BUILDING PER YEAR BY DISTRICT

DISTRICT	NUMBER OF HOURS GREATER THAN PROVIDENCE	
	HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS	ELEMENTARY TEACHERS
Rochester	177 hours	131 hours
Dayton	159	208
Pittsburgh	152	137
Syracuse	91	64
New Haven	73	169
Providence	0	0
Pawtucket	-24	-20

*Data unavailable for Bridgeport.

Key Issue 10. Data and Self-Knowledge

PROBE's initial attempt at finding data within the Providence system has led us to conclude that the school system has a woefully inadequate data collection system. Some of our simplest requests for information could not be met because the system does not collect the data. The schools know little about themselves and cannot identify even the most rudimentary trends. Data gathering and dissemination of information clearly have a low priority.

The central administration could not, for example, tell us how many diplomas each high school had granted nor could it tell us what percentage of the high school graduates were Asian, black,

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"Good ideas never seem to materialize because we are lacking the data.... We are archaic. We are in the dark ages on technology and information gathering. We've carved out little areas without a crossover flow."
—A central administrator

"We don't know how to use information. There's no one qualified to gather it or to use it."
—A central administrator

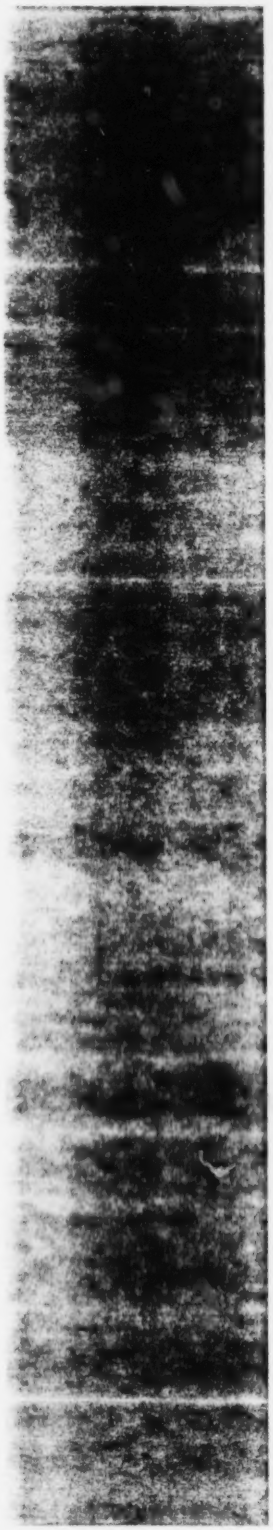
"I'm glad that you let us voice our opinion, and I hope it will make a change before future generations come [here]."
—A high school student

Hispanic, or white. The administration could not tell us the average teacher attendance rate for each school, nor could it tell us, without some delay, the average teacher salary. The system does not know how many 1991 high school graduates were admitted to college, nor even how many had applied. No one has ever examined how MAT scores or academic grades differ along racial/ethnic lines. The system has issued more than 3,000 suspensions, yet no one has examined what impact suspension has on students.

This lack of information reflects what we found to be a fundamental lack of self-knowledge. The people who work in Providence schools—especially the central administrators—do not know enough about their schools. The situation creates three serious problems for the schools: First, without sufficient data, the School Board, administrators, principals, and teachers cannot make effective decisions. Second, without sufficient data, the system is made more vulnerable to politics and personalities. Finally, without data, the system cannot document its progress. Many people within the Providence schools feel that the local newspaper and television stations have unfairly condemned the schools. Until the school system carefully collects data and reports this information regularly, the community will never support fully the schools.

WHAT IS POSSIBLE

Chapter Four



PROBE is recommending many important changes that will serve to create and support a new student/teacher experience in Providence schools. This vision of what can happen in a learning environment is based not only on sound educational practice and research, but on the voices of Providence educators, parents, business and other community people, and, most important, articulate middle school and high school students.

Providence must create for its students a rigorous educational experience that challenges and intrigues them—one that requires them to learn basic skills as well as to become independent learners and responsible citizens.

What will one see in this new environment?

❖ Students actively involved in learning activities.

❖ Students expressing their points of view.

❖ Students working cooperatively and actively interacting with other students on class assignments and group projects.

❖ Students working together in mixed groups with students of varying ability levels, racial/ethnic backgrounds, and physical and learning disabilities.

❖ Teachers listening to students, facilitating student learning rather than controlling and lecturing to students.

❖ Teachers working closely with an individual student or a small group of students while other students work independently in small groups.

❖ Teachers from different disciplines working together with groups of students, incorporating more than one discipline into activities and projects.

❖ Students working on projects that reflect the cultures and languages of the student population.

❖ Students and teachers working with flexible blocks of time, realizing that focused learning can be difficult to achieve in 45- to 50-minute periods.

❖ Students using computers and library resources to access and use information.

❖ Members of the community (parents, business people, scientists, artists) working regularly with student groups, bringing their experience and diverse backgrounds to student activities and projects.

❖ Students going into the community on a regular basis, not just for "look–see" visits, but as an integral part of learning projects.

❖ Students demonstrating their newly acquired skills and learning through performances and presentations, as well as more traditional testing methods.

❖ Student products, e.g., essays, artwork, computer programs, not only displayed but compiled for each student as an ongoing record of achievement.

WHAT MUST BE DONE

Chapter Five

IMAGINE...

Imagine what Providence would be like if all of its children had the opportunity to learn how to think clearly and creatively, to develop confidence by acquiring valuable and satisfying skills, and to understand and enjoy a wide range of friends drawn from a rich panoply of heritages. Imagine how this could advance and enliven Providence and all of Rhode Island.

Is it within the bounds of possibility? We think so. In a time and a place strained by distrust and cynicism, and after 18 months of scrutiny, why should we imagine? Because here is some of what we found.

❖ A vast majority of people who want schools of quality, a sharp contrast to the small handful who say it isn't worth trying.

❖ A vibrant city energized by cultural diversity but almost overwhelmed by the burdens of poverty, the lack of family structure, and the inability to provide from its own resources the margin of difference between mediocrity and sound strength. This is a city all but ignored by a state that is deeply dependent on its existence.

❖ Resilient people, well-intentioned and anxious to hope and to help, but struggling within a faulty, poorly developed system.

❖ An incredible opportunity to reshape the schools as the first step in solving society's basic problems of illiteracy, innumeracy, and hopelessness. As the schools go, so goes the city; as the city goes, so goes the state.

We have found a school system confused in priorities. Some view it for its personal rewards—salary, fringe benefits, short workdays, job security. Others see it for its patronage possibilities; it consumes the largest share of the city's budget. Still others wonder about its alleged vast bureaucracy.

We insist there is but one interest group: the young people of Providence. Our sole concern is to establish a climate for learning within which a well-qualified, eager teacher can become the catalyst for a lifetime of enrichment on the part of an inspired, enthusiastic student. All else serves only to support and enhance this demanding encounter.

We know it will take major changes in attitudes and priorities among virtually all those involved in order to achieve this high goal. The following pages spell out what individual citizens can do and what can be accomplished by various groups. In particular, we will point out the obligations of the Mayor, the City Council, the School Board, the central administration and principals, the unions, the teachers, and the parents and students.

On the next two pages is a diagram of the changes we recommend. The pages thereafter describe each recommendation and the reasons behind it.

IMAGINE WHAT YOU WILL SEE IN THE PROVIDENCE SCHOOLS...

...WHEN PEOPLE CHANGE

Recognize

(Recommendation 1)

- The need for all-pervasive personal and organizational change
- Opportunities in student diversity
- The necessity of communication and cooperation
- The importance of trust

Resolve to

- Raise expectations of all in the system
- Redefine roles and responsibilities
- Work cooperatively
- Improve communication, especially listening

...WHEN STRUCTURES CHANGE

Smaller Schools Units

(Recommendation 2)

- Create smaller units within the schools
- Create charter schools
- Establish small schools within businesses, cultural institutions (outside of the school building)

More Time for Education

(Recommendations 3–6)

- Institute longer school day for students
- Institute longer school day and year for teachers

Hiring and Contract Processes

(Recommendations 7–14)

- School Board appointment
- Hiring of administrators
- Hiring of teachers
- Budget process
- Code of ethics
- Hiring of assistant principals, secretaries
- Accountability of custodial services

A rigorous educational experience that challenges and intrigues students, requiring them to acquire basic skills and to reason for themselves

- Students actively involved in learning, frequently in a community setting.
- Teachers working together to stress the inter-connection of knowledge.
- Teachers talking with and listening to individual students.
- Students working together of group projects which reflect the cultures and languages of the students in their school.
- Students and teachers workings flexible blocks of time.
- Students and teachers relying on the use of computers and library resources
- Parents and teachers as papers in the education of the student.
- The community serving a resource for the schools, the teachers and the students.

...WHEN RESOURCES CHANGE

Professional Development and Evaluation

(Recommendations 22–27)

- School Board
- Central administration
- Principals and assistant principals
- Teachers

Increased Financial and Professional Resources

(Recommendations 28–35)

- Implement changes in funding, e.g., 60/40 state/local funding
- Hire full-time grant writer
- Allocate funds to address immediate priority needs
- Encourage community (business community, social services agencies, higher education, R.I. Department of Education) to donate expertise and facilities
- Increase business involvement
- Support early childhood education
- Support multicultural arts programs

Data Support and Information Sharing

(Recommendation 36)

- Redesign computer system
- Construct and maintain school and system data bases
- Share information with the community and within the school system

Participatory Processes

(Recommendations 15–19)

- Organize regular discussion sessions for teachers
- Organize student committees
- Establish informal student town meetings
- Establish informal parent town meetings
- Organize discussion meetings for principals and assistant principals

School Goals

(Recommendation 20)

- Focus on student achievement
- Base goals on input from students, parents, teachers, community
- Include cultural diversity of student populations
- Incorporate outreach to parents and community
- Use measurable objectives
- Report progress annually
- Communicate widely to school community

School-Based Management

(Recommendation 21)

Shared decision-making through school cabinet

- Goals
- Budget
- Personnel and staffing

Recognition of Promising Programs

(Recommendation 37)

- Recognize, support, and evaluate
- If appropriate, expand or use as models for new initiatives

Review and Reform of Weak Areas

(Recommendation 38)

- Review and evaluate
- Present findings, recommendations, and time line for implementation

FIGURE 4.1
SCHEMATIC OF PROBE RECOMMENDATIONS

IMAGINE WHAT YOU WILL SEE IN THE PROVIDENCE SCHOOLS...

...WHEN PEOPLE CHANGE

Recommendation 1. Recognize and Resolve

Recommendation: PROBE's first and overriding recommendation calls for recognition and resolution from the people of Providence—recognition of the problems but also the opportunities within their schools and resolution that substantial change is entirely possible.

Our first concern is that the citizens know their schools as they are. Without this knowledge there is no base for change. To that end, we have asked those most closely involved to describe their schools and to tell us what is happening within them. And we have gathered an immense amount of data to test those descriptions.

We believe that these views and this information should be made as widely available as possible. We urge everyone to study this report with care, to discuss it thoroughly, and not to dismiss it merely as a plea for more funding. More funding is essential, of course, but healthy change in many areas is possible without larger budgets. First priority must be given to changes in motivation, attitudes, and priorities.

As a beginning, all those involved in the operation of the schools must resolve to put aside individual concerns and differences in order to put children first. We are deeply troubled by the numerous indications of an absence of trust between and among individuals and groups and by the sometimes overriding concern for power and privilege rather than for confidence and quality.

We have found too often a school system fragmented by suspicion and the pursuit of personal or narrow group interest. It has few commonly shared goals, little sense of focus and priority, and even less confidence and pride.

On the other hand, we have found an abundance of dedicated and effective teachers, concerned and supportive parents, enthusiastic and hopeful students, and a new Superintendent and new Teachers Union President who want constructive change. Clearly, the foundation exists for excellence in the schools. We believe deeply that the transformation can take place, but it will require *recognition* and *resolution* of a high order.

> PROBE's interviews with members of the School Board were the first indication to us of the depth of the lack of trust in other parts of the school system. When we were told, for example, that the School Board members were restive with the amount of back-up materials they receive before each meeting, we asked if an executive summary would help. The answer was yes, but the School Board members do not trust anyone in central administration to prepare it.
>
> The current personnel system is designed neither to reward excellence in teaching nor to discourage incompetence. Eighty-nine percent of the teachers feel that teacher incompetence is not addressed in the Providence schools, while 91% feel that excellence is not recognized. This is a clear mandate for change on the part of both the Teachers Union and the administration. It should have the priority attention of the School Board, especially because the most recent contract with the teachers permits the beginning of change.

Principals and teachers speak freely of the best way to get something in their building repaired: When a window needs replacement, the principal asks a teacher to file a grievance with the Teachers Union, which will force the central administration to take action to direct the repair. The Superintendent then must spend the better part of one day each week hearing grievances.

Communication is so inadequate between and among the system's various parts that little priority is given to the interchange between principal and teachers at each school.

School Board members speak openly of the numerous instances in which they invade without hesitation the managerial prerogatives of central administration. They see this as their duty because the administration is not sufficiently responsive to parents. Clearly, there is inadequate understanding of the boundaries of leadership and of the roles each must play. This same misunderstanding became evident when PROBE looked into the perceptions of how other groups and individuals define their responsibilities. We came away with the clear impression that power games are so much a part of the operation of the school system that few recognize them as the divisive force they have become. The time has come for those who point fingers to turn the fingers toward themselves.

Some would say that the actors must change before the roles can be redefined. We are not yet convinced that the solution need be so drastic. We think that most of those involved can recognize that, for the sake of the children, there must be give-and-take and a mammoth coming together.

There is, for example, near unanimous agreement in our surveys that the level of expectation could and should be raised for everyone in the system, beginning with the students themselves. The students, indeed, ask for higher expectations, for more challenging learning. Fifty-nine percent of the surveyed high school students report that they spend less than one hour each day on homework, and 64% say they could handle more challenging work in school. That response alone could be read as a strong indication of weakness in the schools, but we view it as an opportunity not to be missed.

A widespread, pervasive change in attitude will require an equally widespread and pervasive willingness to work cooperatively between and among all levels. Cooperation begins with the recognition of the importance of listening—to teachers, to students, to parents. A teacher told us, "Sometimes I think I'm on an island all alone with my class." Thirty-two percent of all teachers report that during the past academic year not one administrator or teacher visited their classroom.

To cope successfully with a different set of challenges, all in the system must be willing to reexamine the work they do, the manner in which they work, and the way they communicate. To some, this may sound far too much to expect. Nonetheless, we view its necessity so strongly that we call upon the people of Providence to insist upon such a change, and we call upon the Mayor of Providence to take leadership in what must be the first step in true transformation. Again, the solutions to the problems of Providence do not begin with the mere infusion of more money. The solutions begin with the resolution to change old ways of thinking and acting.

IMAGINE WHAT YOU WILL SEE IN THE PROVIDENCE SCHOOLS...

...WHEN STRUCTURES CHANGE

Smaller School Units

Recommendation 2. Create Smaller Learning Environments

Recommendation: Large schools must be restructured into smaller units with more personal environments and closer student/adult relationships. Students in these units will be engaged in active learning that draws on multiple disciplines and that makes use of resources available in the community.

In each smaller unit, 150 to 300 students will remain throughout their years in the school with a limited number of teachers. This will be true on all levels (elementary, middle, and high). This grouping will renew the teacher's role and responsibility as advisor-advocate for students.

A common time will be provided for teachers to meet and plan within each unit. Teachers can use some of this time to develop a curriculum with a thematic interdisciplinary focus or specific approaches to teaching, e.g., Montessori, reading across the curriculum. Using professional development funds specifically allocated to individual schools (see Recommendation 26), teachers in a unit will work with their principal to design and coordinate professional development opportunities relevant to their unit.

Given that all schools must be student outcome-based, the particular challenge of these smaller units, especially the ones using truly multidisciplinary approaches, is to develop new measures that accurately reflect student achievement in individual learning environments.

Principals, teachers, parents, and other members of the community are urged to develop separate, small school units on any level located within business, industrial, arts, and community service settings.

I. Smaller Units within the High Schools

A. Teachers working together within these units will have the authority to organize a large part of their students' learning time in a flexible manner, rather than within the confines of the traditional 40- to 50-minute class period.

B. The students in each high school unit will be grouped heterogeneously to encourage cooperative learning and teaching techniques.

C. Each unit on the high school level will have the opportunity to develop a clearly articulated academic theme/orientation, e.g., business, humanities, law and government, multicultural, to be pursued by students and teachers.

1. This academic orientation will encourage interdisciplinary learning and teaching and will offer an opportunity for teachers to work together, planning and using a focused curriculum that builds on student and teacher interest, experience, and strengths.

2. Each of these theme-oriented units within a school will have academic autonomy. Measures of student achievement may be unique in nature; graduation requirements, however, must be met by each unit.

3. One teacher within each thematic unit will teach part-time and serve as a coordinator, assisting and leading other teachers in developing curriculum, teaching techniques, assessment tools, and parent and community outreach methods. The funds currently used to compensate department chairs must be reallocated to compensate these unit coordinators.

D. A system must be developed to enable middle school students to choose which high school unit they will attend.

High school students in Providence display several characteristics essential for their success as adults. They clearly respect the diversity so apparent among them. They want to work harder in school and want more challenge, as well as the opportunity to express their points of view and to assume greater responsibility within their schools.

PROBE has found that the environment in Providence high schools, however, is widely plagued by some chronic ailments conflicting with aspirations.

❖ The relationships of teachers with students, administrators, parents, and among themselves are languishing.

❖ Teachers feel isolated from their colleagues and have too little time together to share ideas, teaching techniques, and strategies on how to help individual students.

❖ Students say they are bored by passive assignments and constant lecturing. They long for learning that is active, fun, relevant, and challenging. They want opportunities to make use of community resources.

❖ Students say personal relationships and one-on-one conversations with their teachers should occur more often.

❖ Control, instead of responsibility, is the prevailing mode of operation.

Students almost always link good experiences in school to a teacher or counselor with whom they have a close relationship. When students are asked what they like best about their school, almost one-third of the responses involve teachers. Comments focus on the teachers' interest in the students, e.g., "...the teachers who really care about me, and really show interest in my fellow students."

But when students were asked what one important change is needed at their school, many look again to the teachers. As one student states, "Make the teachers care, understand, listen." Another student writes, "Let the teacher understand me more."

Teachers and principals tell PROBE they are concerned about professional relationships in their schools. Teachers feel that communication with other adults in their school is minimal at best. The isolation they feel is largely a product of time constraints and the size of the schools.

Many parents of high school students are concerned about the relationship between teachers and students and about communication between school and home. Fifty-three percent of those surveyed said they get enough information about their children's progress. Thirty-seven percent (compared with 61% of parents of elementary school students) agree that their children's teachers draw on the strengths of their children. Forty-five percent (76% of parents of elementary school students) believe that their children's teachers help their children feel good about themselves.

The size of the school and the learning atmosphere that stems from that size influence what kind of activities take place in the classroom (see Table 5.1).

TABLE 5.1
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

High school students were asked how often the following happens in *most* of their classes...

COMMENT	PERCENT OF STUDENTS WHO ANSWERED *OFTEN* OR *VERY OFTEN*
The teacher talks to me one-on-one.	29%
I get to work with other students on projects.	31%
I get to express my point of view in class discussions.	44%
The teacher does all the talking.	63%
We read sections of the book and answer questions at the end.	48%
I get to study things that interest me.	29%
The homework is meaningful.	40%
I learn things that I can use in "real life."	44%
We hear outside speakers.	10%
We go on field trips.	6%

Repeatedly, students told PROBE they want change:

> *"More discussions—independent research would encourage students to think for themselves and not be told the facts but discover them."*

> *"Work on other things besides the book and dittos; I'd like to have fun learning sometimes."*

> *"Less lecturing. The teachers don't really believe in letting us think for ourselves. They focus on having us memorize their ideas."*

> *"Instead of the teacher always teaching, I would like to get up and explain how I see things, because sometimes your peers will understand you better."*

A positive finding is that both teachers and students want more opportunities for active learning. Sixty-two percent of teachers indicate that they would like to have their students work in small groups on project work. Fifty-five percent would like to increase the number of field trips.

Two of the most disconcerting findings from the high school student surveys relate to challenge and homework. Sixty-four percent of the high school students believe they could handle more challenging work. Fifty-nine percent say they spend less than one hour each evening on homework.

Students have conflicting feelings about discipline. Many, especially at Central High School and Mt. Pleasant High School, complain that "troublemakers" disrupt their education. At the same time, they react negatively to restrictions on their freedom and their lack of a voice in school affairs. For example, students at Classical High School say that they long to be treated as responsible young people, yet find themselves barred from their locker section during most of the school day.

Principals and teachers are no more pleased about discipline problems. They say too much time and energy is spent trying to maintain order. High school suspensions have increased by more than 100% during the last 10 years, from approximately 400 in 1982 to more than 1,200 in 1991 (while the school population grew by only 20%). Data from the parents survey indicate that 62% of the parents whose children have been suspended believe that the suspension did not help their children. Middle school students express concern that some students try to get suspended on purpose so they do not have to go to school and that others are suspended for minor reasons and then have to struggle to bring up their grades after three days of zeros. And yet, in-school suspensions are no longer used because of budget cuts.

PROBE believes that as the schools create smaller, more personal environments for students, and as teachers renew their role of student advisor-advocate, discipline and suspension will be of less concern.

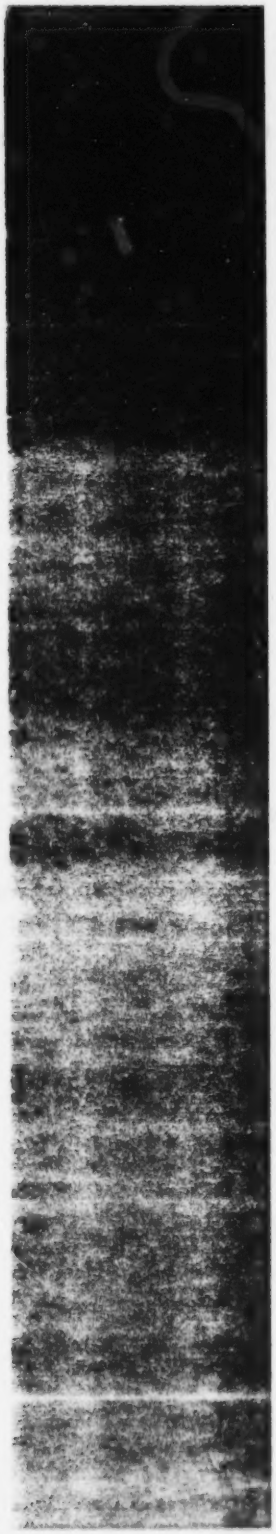
The experiences described by the students in large schools certainly contrast sharply with those of students in the much smaller high school, ALP. ALP students are enthusiastic about the family atmosphere in the school, which they say encourages warm relationships with other students and teachers. One ALP student wrote, "The teachers here I consider as my brothers and sisters because of the way they help me out."

Differences between ALP and the larger schools are clear in questionnaire results and in comments from ALP focus group. Students in the focus group recall their experiences in large middle schools and high schools, where they claim there was no one who cared personally about them. As one girl said, "I used to bunk and go to Thayer Street. When I asked one of my teachers for a pass, she'd say, 'Here's a pass to Thayer Street.' My teachers would see me there and not care." This girl emphasized how hurt she was by this attitude and how it made her feel that she had no good reason to go to school.

ALP students emphasize that the small size of their school allows an atmosphere of respect and trust between teachers and students. Students believe that this atmosphere greatly enhances their self-confidence, self-discipline, and independent learning. The principal and students at ALP describe a quite different school experience, one in which students assume a personal responsibility for their learning and their behavior.

The importance of close, personal relationships with adults is also emphasized by students involved in the School-to-Work Transition Program, a collaboration with the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce. Students give much of the credit for the success of the program to the close, caring relationships they have with adult mentors in school and at the workplace.

Students in this program, which allows them to learn and work in a community setting, say that the program has helped prepare them for what comes next in their lives. In the words of one participant, "I'm learning how other people are taking care of their work. You see how they dress. We dress different in the street than we do at work." Another student said, "I like it



[work]. You learn a lot. You do different things all the time within the job. I move around a lot in different departments."

All of these findings underscore the value of smaller learning units at the high school level. In addition, 86% of secondary school principals (middle schools and high schools) say that dividing large schools into smaller, more manageable houses would improve the quality of education in their schools.

This more personal environment improves communication, promotes stronger student/teacher relationships, and encourages more active learning that engages both students and teachers. It allows academic focus drawn from the interests and strengths of both the students and teachers, as well as making use of resources available in the community.

Models

ALP serves as a local model for a small learning environment. It has a small student body (150) and a small faculty (eight to 12) and is located in a separate building. It provides an environment that fosters close, personal student/teacher relationships and the active involvement of students in their education.

Schools in District 4 in East Harlem, New York, have been divided into small units of 50 to 300 students and provide a wide variety of learning environments and academic orientations. The schools report considerable success in terms of standardized test scores, school attendance, and other measures.

Philadelphia has developed and implemented its Charter School model. Large high schools are divided into smaller units of 300 to 400 students. Each unit has a finite group of teachers who develop a thematic curriculum and teach only the students in their unit. Students generally remain in one unit throughout their high school careers. Charter Schools are now in most of the city's high schools, with some buildings completely chartered. The schools are based on the following tenets.

❖ Academic orientation encourages interdisciplinary learning and teaching; it allows teachers working together to develop a focused curriculum that builds on student/teacher interests, experiences, and strengths.

❖ Each unit has academic autonomy and is required to meet graduation requirements.

❖ One teacher within each unit teaches part-time and serves as a coordinator, assisting and leading other teachers in developing curriculum, teaching techniques, assessment tools, and parent and community outreach methods.

Implementation

By the fall of 1994, at least one large high school in Providence must be restructured into smaller units of students and teachers who stay together over a period of years. To the extent possible, this must be done voluntarily. The rest of the large high schools will be restructured within three more years.

Working together with shared meeting and planning time, teachers in each unit establish goals for student achievement, develop skills in advising, discuss the educational needs of individuals, and

plan training useful to the school as a unit. Training in student advising, team building, parent outreach, and identification of social services needs will be important.

Implementation of the charter model will be more complex. More planning time and professional training will be required to help teachers develop an interdisciplinary curriculum. To be effective, the ideas and direction must come from the teachers themselves.

Funding for professional training must be provided after a proposal has been accepted by the administration and the School Board. Funding must also be provided to enable one of the charter teachers to spend two-fifths of his or her time as a charter coordinator.

The School Department must disseminate information about the charter model in the fall of 1993. Initial proposals will be reviewed for acceptance in early 1994.

II. Smaller Units within the Middle Schools

A. Within each grade roughly 100 students will be grouped with a team of four to six teachers. This will ease the difficult transition that middle school requires of students and facilitate communication among teachers working with the same children.

B. Teachers working together within these teams must share common meeting and preparation time. They must also have the authority to organize a large part of their students' learning time in a flexible manner, rather than within the confines of the traditional 45- to 50-minute class period.

C. The students within each team will be grouped heterogeneously to encourage cooperative learning and teaching techniques.

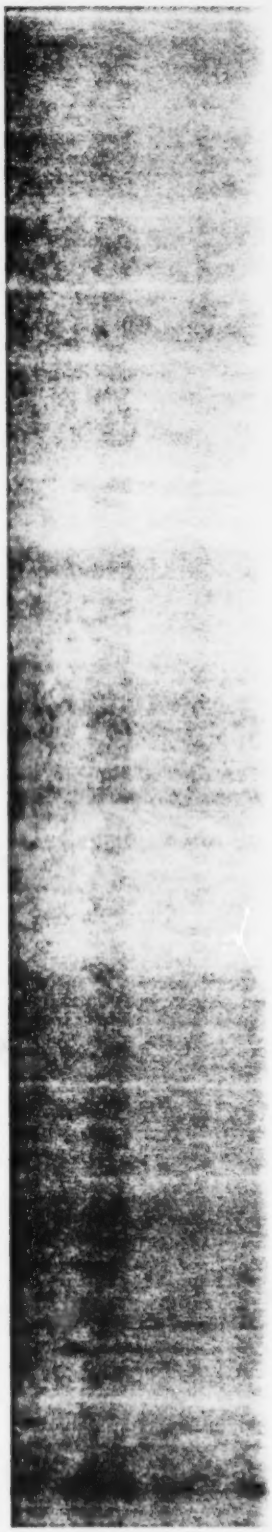
D. A group consisting of a team from each grade will make up a small school unit within a middle school. This school unit, made up of 12 to 18 teachers working with 300 students who stay in the same unit over the three years, will approximate the environment of a small middle school.

Supporting Results

Although middle school students were not asked to complete written questionnaires, focus groups were held at four middle schools. These students show willingness to learn and a desire to be excited about what they are doing in school. There were a few positive stories told along these lines. For example, one seventh grade girl described with great excitement "creating a new society" in her social studies class. The students designed businesses, language, money, and food for the new society. And, of most importance to the seventh grader, students were able to move around the room and work and talk together.

In many ways, the experiences described by the middle school students mirrored the experiences of the high school students in terms of relationships with teachers, classroom activities, and school climate. Three noticeable differences did emerge, however.

❖ Many middle school students claim to be overwhelmed with the amount of homework they have to do. They wish teachers would communicate more among themselves so that the workload would be more evenly distributed over time.



❖ Middle school students are even more critical of the instruction they receive. They say their role in class is too often passive and boring; they strain to grasp the relevance of what they are taught.

❖ They are even more disgruntled than high school students by what they feel is too much control being exercised over their minds, bodies, and voices. They feel they are without power and influence in the classroom and in the school. They want to be more active, to move more freely, and to express their views. They say it is difficult to act responsibly when adults assume they will not.

In one area, middle school principals and teachers differ from their counterparts in high schools. Sixty-seven percent of middle school teachers think that gang activity has increased in their schools, and 73% feel that the number of weapons brought to school has increased. In a school using the unit and team structures, these conditions may be addressed more easily and effectively.

In terms of traditional measures of academic achievement, the MAT scores at the middle school level are of considerable concern, showing a consistent decrease in average percentile between the sixth and eighth grades over the last five years. For example, in 1991, the sixth grade average total test percentile was 46, whereas the eighth grade average total percentile was 39.

Models

Breaking up large middle schools into smaller units, using team teaching, increasing teachers' advisory role, and using active, cooperative learning are all important elements in the recent Carnegie report *Turning Points* and the report by R.I. Middle Level Educators (RIMLE).

Middle schools in District 4 in East Harlem, New York, have engaged in the kind of dramatic restructuring just described above in the section on high school restructuring. East Harlem's middle schools, like its high schools, are powerful models.

Implementation

By the fall of 1994, at least two of the large middle schools in the system must be restructured into smaller units of students and teachers who stay together over three years. This restructuring will include smaller teams of students and teachers within each unit. To the extent possible, this restructuring must be done voluntarily. The rest of the middle schools will be restructured within three more years.

Working together with shared meeting and planning time, teachers in each unit will set goals for student achievement, develop skills in advising students, discuss the educational needs of individual students, and plan training useful to them as a unit. Training in student advising, team building, parent outreach, and identifying social services needs will be important.

III. Smaller Units within the Large Elementary Schools

A. Smaller units of approximately three classes at each grade level (for a total of 15 classes and teachers) must be created in the large

elementary schools in order to approximate the more personal environment of the small elementary schools.

B. Common meeting and planning time will be provided for teachers within each unit, especially for teachers on the same grade level and for teachers who wish to develop interdisciplinary approaches.

C. Units will use cooperative learning and teaching techniques to enhance student-centered learning.

D. Teachers working together within these units will have the authority to organize a large part of their students' learning time in a flexible manner.

Our research indicates that the learning and teaching environments in the elementary schools offer support and opportunity for growth for both students and teachers to a greater extent than the middle schools and high schools.

In terms of traditional measures of student achievement, over the last five years, the average percentiles reached in grades one through six have improved by five to 12 percentiles. In addition, the percentiles improve as the grades get higher.

In terms of having significant impact on student learning, teachers praise the CIRC program and the literacy program as well as the Chapter 1 after-school reading and math programs. It should be noted, however, that in interviews and focus groups, teachers, principals, and central administrators expressed a need for fairer measures of student achievement that will adequately reflect the gains made in such curriculum initiatives.

Evidence of the relative good health of the elementary schools is abundant in responses to PROBE's surveys of teachers, principals, and parents.

❖ Eighty percent of elementary school teachers believe their students receive an excellent or good education, compared with 55% of middle school teachers and 47% of high school teachers.

❖ One hundred percent of elementary school principals believe their students receive an excellent or good education, compared with 71% of middle school and high school principals who say the education is good (none says excellent).

❖ Seventy-three percent of parents of elementary school students are satisfied with the quality of education their children receive, compared with 70% of parents of middle school students and 55% of parents of high school students.

❖ On average, elementary school principals say that 80% of their teachers maintain high expectations for their students. The average response from secondary school principals is 64%.

❖ Sixty-one percent of parents of elementary school students believe their children's teachers have high goals for their children, compared with 49% of parents of middle school students and 42% of parents of high school students.

Areas of concern remain in the elementary schools, whose teachers suffer from the same lack of communication among adults in the schools. Many teachers say that large class size renders their best efforts inadequate. Others are frustrated in their attempts to involve parents in their children's education. Teachers say discipline is increasingly a problem. Suspension of elementary students has increased in the last 10 years from 6% to 13% of the system's total suspensions. One way in which the Providence schools have tried to deal with this and other discipline problems is by initiating a program of character education in a few elementary schools.

Some teachers say that discipline problems may stem from a feeling of anonymity on the part of the students—a feeling of being one small, unimportant person in a large environment. Restructuring the elementary schools will help to alleviate these problems. Smaller units of up to 300 students will provide more fertile ground for the progress that is being made on the elementary school level. Much-needed communication, planning, and sharing among teachers and principals will be done more easily in smaller groups. When the school unit becomes smaller, the stature of the individual—child, parent, and teacher—becomes larger.

More Time for Education

Recommendation 3. Lengthen Student Working Day

Recommendation: The school day in Providence must be an hour longer for elementary, middle, and high school students. Providence children spend much less time in school than students in comparable urban districts. One more hour each day will give teachers and principals greater flexibility in reshaping instruction to include more cooperative learning activities, hands-on projects, field trips, guest speakers, and independent student projects. (No additional compensation for professionals should be necessary.)

PROBE compared the length of school days in seven other urban districts: Bridgeport, Dayton, New Haven, Pawtucket, Pittsburgh, Rochester, and Syracuse. In all cases, Providence elementary school and high school students are in school fewer hours than their counterparts in other cities (see Table 3.3 on page 25). (The length of the school day in Providence middle schools is near the average of the six other districts.)

Extra hours add up to weeks of schooltime each year. Pittsburgh elementary school students are in school three and one-half weeks more than Providence students; Rochester high school students have four more weeks of school than Providence students. Over 12 years, Pittsburgh and Rochester students are in school a full year more than Providence students.

The length of the school day in Providence was established in the early 1960s and has remained virtually unchanged. (Inquiry indicates that the length of the school day was never negotiated by the School Department and the Teachers Union.)

The teachers and principals at each school must ensure that the longer day is a better day. Planning together, they can reshape their programs with more flexibility to include the activities teachers and students want: to work cooperatively in small groups on projects, to work independently in areas of personal interest, to involve family and community members in activities that draw on the ethnic and cultural wealth of the city, and to go on field trips.

Recommendation 4. Lengthen Teacher Working Day

Recommendation: The teachers' workday must be extended by at least an additional hour on at least one day each week, providing time for teachers and principals to meet and for professional development activities. PROBE recommends that this allocation of time neither reduce students' hours in school nor increase teachers' compensation.

Providence principals and teachers do not have enough time to share ideas about teaching, their students, and goals for their schools. Principals are clear about this: 76% say they are not satisfied with the amount of time they have to meet with teachers. When asked how often and for how long they meet with their faculty each year, the average response was *three times a year for a total of 150 minutes*. Thus, at the typical Providence school, teachers and principals spend less than 5 minutes a week sharing ideas and discussing goals.

In surveys and focus groups, teachers said repeatedly that they do not have adequate time to talk with their colleagues or meet with their principal. Their days are full, lunch is short, and faculty meetings are rare. Many teachers feel a deep sense of isolation. In a typical comment, a high school teacher wrote, "Teachers never get to share their thoughts because of commitments—labs, prep time. Sometimes you feel *alone*."

Research on effective schools demonstrates that the most effective teachers have time to share ideas with their colleagues. This is a fundamental premise in various successful reform efforts led by Theodore Sizer, Henry Levin, James Comer, and Mortimer Adler, as well as in restructuring efforts in Miami, Rochester, Philadelphia, Dayton, and San Antonio.

Many Providence teachers request more time to meet. Comments such as the following are common from teachers at all levels.

> *"There should be an hour a week for after-school meetings. Faculties could meet two times a month. The other weeks could be used by central administration or other concerns."*
>
> —An elementary school teacher

> *"Faculty meetings should be scheduled more often. Discussion should be allowed at these meetings."*
>
> —A middle school teacher

> *"We need more faculty meetings and department meetings to discuss present problems and policies, not only new business."*
>
> —A high school teacher

The working hours of Providence teachers must be revised. Teachers and union leaders in many cities, including Pittsburgh, Rochester, and Dayton, have backed a longer workday to increase the effectiveness and professionalism of teachers.

PROBE's research of other urban districts documents that Providence teachers are required to spend fewer hours in their buildings than teachers in all but one other district, which is also in Rhode Island (see Table 3.4 on page 25).

Some Providence teachers and principals told PROBE they want their day lengthened. They say additional time could be used for sharing successful practices, meeting with teachers from other schools, setting schoolwide goals, meeting with teachers in their own area of specialty, and meeting with teachers from other districts.

Recommendation 5. Expect Teachers to Meet with Parents

Recommendation: Teachers must be required as a minimum to attend an open house for parents held during an evening or a weekend day each fall and to be available for conferences with parents or other family members at least twice a year. These activities must not reduce the hours students are in school.

Once this step has been taken, community and parents organizations must work with teachers and principals to increase the attendance of parents and family members at open houses and conferences.

Overwhelming evidence shows that students are far more likely to succeed in school if parents or other family members meet with teachers to discuss their child's progress. In her book *The Evidence Continues to Grow*, Anne Henderson cites 49 recent studies showing that parental involvement improves student achievement.

In Providence, 88% of teachers agree that children are more likely to succeed when teachers and parents meet; only 3% disagree. Only a small percentage of parents, however, attend conferences with their children's teachers during the course of a year. When Providence teachers are asked to estimate the percentage of parents with whom they meet to discuss academic progress, the mean response is 32%. Although elementary school teachers estimate that they meet with about 48% of parents, the mean for middle school and high school teachers is below 20%. Clearly, a concerted effort is needed to increase the opportunities for parents and teachers to meet.

Many parents in Providence say they are disappointed with the open houses and conferences they have attended because not all of their children's teachers are present. Some cite this as a reason for not participating. Our recommendation to require teacher attendance will help to solve this problem. Community and parent organizations must work with teachers and principals to increase parent attendance.

Recommendation 6. Lengthen Teacher Working Year

Recommendation: The number of days Providence teachers are required to work must be increased from 181 to 186. Three of these five extra days will come at the beginning of the school year, giving teachers and principals (as well as parents and community members) an opportunity to set goals and to plan for the coming year. The two other days—at midyear or year-end, as determined by the principal and staff—will also be used for setting goals, planning, and team-building. They must not be used for arranging classrooms or other housekeeping chores.

Compared with six other urban districts from which PROBE could obtain teacher contracts, Providence teachers have fewer workdays. Providence teachers work 181 days; the average for the six other districts is 186.5.

Providence students attend school the same number of days (180) as students in each of the six other districts. Providence teachers, however, are required to be in school only one day when students are not present (the day before school opens). Thus, at most Providence schools, teachers and principals have virtually no time to carry out long-term planning. With only one day before school opens, teachers have barely six hours to hear new policies, meet new teachers, and unpack their books before the students arrive. Planning is impossible. These additional days can be used profitably for the teachers and principals to plan and assess their school's progress.

> *"We need a planning* week *before school starts in September, weekly grade-level meetings (during the day), and monthly meetings for long-range planning of content projects."*
>
> —An elementary school teacher

Hiring and Contracting Processes

Recommendation 7. Redesign Process for School Board Appointments

Recommendation: The Mayor must create a School Board Nominating Commission, which will make the process of appointing School Board members more systematic and more open to community participation.

In order to have high-quality schools, the district must have excellence in the School Board. If the School Board is to insist on high expectations of everyone in the system, it must have the highest expectations of itself. A fractious and cantankerous School Board can inflict grave damage on the schools it governs and thus on the education of the city's children.

The current School Board is not a unified body, nor one that has a good sense of its own role. Some of the disunity can be traced to the fact that Board members too frequently are appointed because they represent special-interest groups, e.g., an ethnic group, neighborhood, or special-needs population, and feel the burden of being accountable to these groups. Furthermore, most feel they must be responsive to the Mayor rather than to the school system at large. Next to the Teachers Union, they consider the Mayor the second most powerful force in the school system. In our discussion, not one School Board member included the Board itself as having significant power or influence, and only one mentioned the Superintendent.

An ideal board would comprise specialists in some phase of elementary or secondary education, law, finance, management, social services, or personnel administration. All members would be well-acquainted with educational reform, problems of urban cities, and school finance, as well as the importance of keeping politics out of school administration. They would bring to School Board deliberations a broad spectrum of skill and understanding.

PROBE has explored and debated the merits of an appointed school board versus an elected school board. We note that a large majority of urban school boards across the nation are elected, particularly in the larger cities (44 out of 50), and that many have the power to levy taxes. In the past, elected boards have been ineffective in Providence, and PROBE could find no compelling reason to recommend School Board elections. We feel that the School Board is

already too political and should not be made more so. We do feel, however, that steps must be taken immediately to raise the level of expectation and performance.

Providence is unique in the nation (among the 50 urban boards for which data have been compiled) in having a board appointed directly by the Mayor with no input from any other source. All of the other major cities with appointed boards have a nominating system presided over by an independent panel. In Providence, the City Council ratifies the Mayor's choices, but it cannot nominate candidates.

Baltimore's procedure may be most similar to that of Providence, but even in Baltimore the Mayor makes appointments from a list of names submitted by the School Board Nomination Committee, which represents various community interests. The Committee is responsible for reviewing and commenting on all candidates and forwarding a full report on recommendations to the Mayor for a final decision.

PROBE urges the Mayor to establish voluntarily a Nominating Commission to guide the Mayor's selection of new board members and the decision to reappoint continuing members. In this way, Board appointments can be free of criticism, charges of special interest, and suspicion of political control. We ask the Mayor to share with the community the responsibility of selecting a School Board that is responsive to the community (including parents) and represents the best-informed and most balanced group of citizens who care deeply about the schools.

PROBE recommends that the Mayor's Nominating Commission consist of five residents of the city who reflect Providence's racial/ethnic diversity and its various neighborhoods and who are drawn from each of the following:

- ❖ social services agencies (chosen by the head of United Way);
- ❖ the educational community (selected by the presidents of the colleges and universities with Providence campuses);
- ❖ the business community (chosen by the Executive Committee of the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce);
- ❖ parents of schoolchildren (selected by the Superintendent's Parents Council or some other parent group with a broad citywide membership); and
- ❖ PEF's Board, with particular attention to balance in board membership.

Members of the Commission will serve for a term of five years on a rotating basis so that one new member will be chosen each year. Members will be ineligible for reappointment after serving a full five-year term. The chair of the Nominating Commission will be chosen from the membership by the Mayor for a one-year, nonrenewable term.

The Commission will use advertisements and notices to elicit nominees from the public at large, parent groups, civic organizations, unions, and so on. We recommend that the Commission adopt as its guide the criteria of the National School Boards Association. The Commission will be free to use whatever means it deems appropriate for gathering names and screening candidates.

At least three months before the expiration of School Board terms, the Commission will submit to the Mayor the names of at least three acceptable nominees for each vacancy. The Mayor will appoint one of the three or ask the Commission for additional nominees. In no case will the Mayor deviate from the lists furnished by the Commission. Other details of the appointment process can be determined by the Commission in consultation with the Mayor.

Recommendation 8. Conduct National Search for Superintendent

Recommendation: Whenever it becomes necessary for the School Board to search for a new Superintendent, that effort must include a national search for candidates and wide participation by the community. The School Board will continue, however, to hold responsibility for the final decision.

A new Superintendent should assume his or her duties with a sense of strong support from the community. Candidates for the position should be sought nationally and interviewed by representatives of such groups as parent organizations, the teachers and principals unions, the business community, students, and civic organizations working with the schools. In a public forum, candidates should discuss their views on problems in urban education, answer questions on their views, and propose solutions. The School Board should seek the views of those who have had contact with the candidates, and it should demonstrate to the community that the School Board values the opinions of all who have a stake in the schools.

Recommendation 9. Conduct National Search for Administrators

Recommendation: The School Board must give the Superintendent the authority and the means to search thoroughly and nationally for the best principals and other administrators and to recommend only those who are clearly qualified professionally and personally.

The Providence School Department has relied repeatedly on a relatively small pool of in-house candidates with some teaching or administrative experience to fill key positions including highly specialized ones. This practice has led to the appointment of officials with limited qualifications to serve in positions requiring specific professional skills. Because of these precedents, political influence has become a factor in determining who will fill some of the school system's most important posts.

The School Board must insist on a simple standard for appointments: the best-qualified person. School Department hiring must not serve political interests through a system of patronage that saps the schools of the quality of strong leadership they desperately need. The specter of intrusion was raised repeatedly in conversations PROBE held with administrators, union officers, and teachers. One School Board member said frankly that the message should go forth to City Hall, "Back off. Back off. You are pushing us too hard and too often."

Only 15% of principals believe that promotion decisions are fair. One principal writes, "Advancements are not based on intelligence or exemplary job performance.... Extraordinary administrative vision and potential are a wasted resource in the Providence School Department advancement structure." Another principal is more succinct: "Decisions are made before the interviews are held."

In the 1992 revision of the contract with the Providence Teachers Union, provision was made for the Superintendent to recommend qualified candidates for administrative positions from outside the system, provided they are clearly superior to anyone within the system. The hiring process, however, does not provide any encouragement or funding to search beyond Providence for candidates. This situation must be corrected. National searches must be mandatory for all major offices.

Recommendation 10. Institute School-Based Hiring for Teachers

Recommendation: Sweeping changes must be made in the process used to hire teachers. The principal and teachers in each school must take part in the selection of faculty for their building. When a vacant position occurs, the principal and a group of teachers must be authorized to:

- *develop a detailed job description and posting that outlines their specific needs, which could include academic expertise, experience, pedagogic approach, and other special skills and experience;*
- *choose finalists after reviewing the four to eight dossiers, sent by the personnel office, of certified candidates who work in the system* and *certified candidates who are* not *currently employees of the School Department; and*
- *interview finalists and send the name of their choice to the appropriate assistant superintendent, who will notify the selected candidate.*

The primary goal must be to encourage teachers and principals to take responsibility for creating unique and exciting communities of learning. Another important goal will be to increase the number of nonwhite teachers. Seniority, as established by years within the system or days working as a substitute, cannot *remain the sole criterion for hiring Providence teachers.*

Providence's process of filling vacancies is a significant impediment to achieving excellence. The current system relies heavily on seniority; the qualified teacher with the most seniority has the *right* to transfer into any opening in any building. If no teacher in the system wants to transfer into a new position, the qualified teacher who has worked the most days as a substitute has the *right* to that position. The people who work in a school have no say as to who fills a vacancy.

The city's system for hiring and transferring teachers fails to consider the ability of candidates to address the specific needs of a school and its students. Thus, principal and teachers are denied the opportunity to build a cohesive faculty and develop a unique academic or pedagogic focus. They must accept whoever is most senior, regardless of that candidate's skills or interests. The quality of a teacher has little to do with these appointments. Perhaps worst of all, many people within the Providence schools feel that the hiring system destroys the enthusiasm and surely some of the professional skill of teachers. Five years of work as a substitute, moving from building to building, reinforces a teacher's skills at controlling, not inspiring, students.

Providence's hiring system is fundamentally different from that of most cities that have begun to change their school systems. Three cities with reputations for excellence (Dayton, Pittsburgh, and San Antonio) all have revised their hiring system to give the people at each building the power to select their new colleagues. Table 5.2 provides a simplified look at the differences between the system Providence uses to fill teacher vacancies and the system Dayton uses.

Providence principals could not be more clear in their opinion of the hiring process for teachers. All the principals who returned PROBE's survey agree that they could improve the quality of education in their schools if they had a say in the hiring and transfer of teachers. When asked what *single* change they would make in order to improve the quality of education in Providence public schools, more than one-half of Providence's principals say change the hiring system.

Hiring excellent minority teachers is especially difficult in Providence. The School Department's teacher recruiter says she frequently goes to recruiting conferences and watches other urban districts hire the best candidates because they can offer immediate full-time appointments. Providence can only

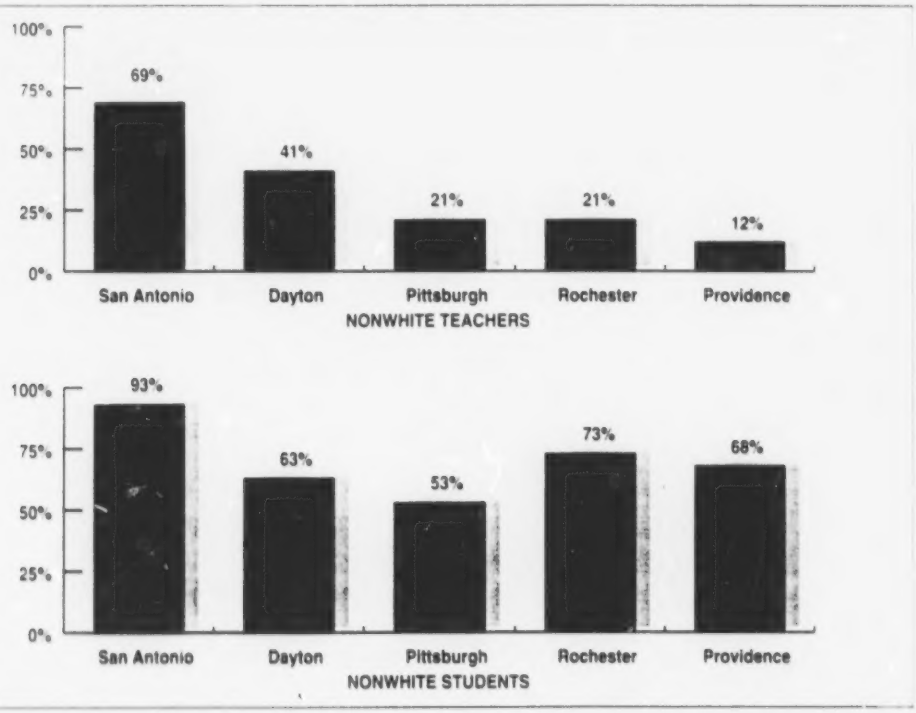
offer substitute positions. Minority candidates, who are recruited actively by most cities, are especially unlikely to choose a substitute job in Providence when they can have their own classrooms in other districts. While there are many reasons for the small number of minority teachers in Providence, the hiring system is clearly one reason that Providence has a far lower percentage of minority teachers than other districts (see Figure 5.1). Only 35% of parents are satisfied with the number of minority teachers.

TABLE 5.2
COMPARISON OF THE HIRING PROCESS BETWEEN PROVIDENCE AND DAYTON SCHOOL DISTRICTS

PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DISTRICT	DAYTON SCHOOL DISTRICT
❖ Candidate earns Rhode Island certification and passes National Teachers Examination (NTE) or gets temporary certification.	❖ Candidate earns Ohio certification and passes Selector Institute test.
❖ After successful interview with personnel office, teacher becomes per diem substitute.[1]	❖ Personnel office sends four qualified candidates to a school.
❖ Candidate works 140 days in one year as a per diem substitute and then becomes a long-term substitute (LTS). This process takes from between one to five years.	❖ Principal and team of teachers and parents interview candidates and make a selection.[2]
❖ Candidate works his or her way up LTS list (from between one to five years) and must accept appointment at first building that has an opening in teacher's area of certification. (Principal and teacher at that building have no say in this appointment.)	

[1]Teachers certified in areas of immediate need, e.g., bilingual, special education, are hired immediately. Minority candidates automatically become long-term substitutes.
[2]Principal makes this decision alone if that school does not have an approved, districtwide plan for school-based management.

FIGURE 5.1
COMPARISON OF PERCENTAGE OF NONWHITE TEACHERS TO NONWHITE STUDENTS IN SELECTED SCHOOL DISTRICTS



In the past, the Providence Teachers Union has argued that unless substitutes are promised rights to a full-time job, finding an adequate number of substitute teachers will be difficult. Other cities that have adopted school-based hiring systems have not found this to be so. Rochester, Dayton, San Antonio, and Pittsburgh report that they have no difficulty getting enough substitute teachers, in part because the substitute teachers are hired to work at a specific school, thereby becoming a part of the school community. Moreover, the new system may reduce the number of substitutes a school needs because the principal and teachers can choose candidates with excellent work records.

Recommendation 11. Establish and Enforce a Strict Code of Ethics

Recommendation: The School Board, with the leadership of the Superintendent, must develop for itself and the entire school system a code of ethics in order that the operation of the schools represents to the students and the public the highest possible standards of judgment and conduct. In particular, the schools must not be victimized by conflicts of interest, political interference, and favoritism.

Large city school systems represent temptation to politicians. The system consumes the largest share of the city's budget with a tempting collection of trained and semitrained positions to be filled. Furthermore, the common perception is that prestige and perks come with one's association with educational institutions. Providence is no exception.

A school system can be weakened badly by political intrusion, by favoritism in the selection of appointees, by maneuvering to obtain union support. Although the chief executive of a city may have a lead role in the appointment of a school board, that executive must avoid the temptation to manipulate what could be looked upon as "the Mayor's payroll" or "the Mayor's contract." The Mayor should appoint and hold accountable but not interfere.

For its part, the School Board should agree, for example, not to entertain overtures in behalf of candidates for employment. Nor should the central administrators be party to special favoritism.

We are also concerned about the possibility of a conflict of interest between union and management. We find, for example, that the negotiation and settlement of the contract with the Providence Teachers Union determines automatically (by percentage of the wage scale) the compensation of central administrators and of school building administrators, including principals. Only the salary of the Superintendent of Schools is separate from the teacher settlement. Obviously, then, in a time of pressure for higher wages leading toward a possible strike, a conflict of interest could exist between management positions and personal gain. A separate wage schedule should be established for nonteachers.

In similar fashion, not even the smallest hint of impropriety should intrude upon the negotiating process in collective bargaining. For example, no member of a management team negotiating a contract should serve on that team if he or she is related through immediate family with anyone who would benefit directly from the contract settlement. This and similar safeguards should be above questioning or compromising.

Recommendation 12. Redesign the Budget Process

Recommendation: The school system's budgeting process must be redesigned. At the outset of the process, the School Board must establish and make known its funding goals and priorities. Drafts of the budget—and the final budget itself—must demonstrate how the budget meets these goals and priorities. All demands on the budget (including all contractual obligations such as salaries and benefits) must be decided upon before a final budget is passed.

Currently, the system's operational budget planning begins in the fall and extends into the winter when the nonsalary portion is recommended to the School Board, reviewed by that body, and passed along to City Hall. At no time in this process is the issue of teacher compensation (and other compensation as noted above) discussed because union negotiations do not begin in earnest, in effect, until the following summer. The end date of the teachers' contract falls within a few days of the opening of the school year.

Over the years, the contract has been settled at the expense of other pressing priorities, such as purchasing an adequate supply of books and educational materials; repairing buildings; creating data banks; reviewing the valued system of in-house suspensions in disciplinary cases; and funding the professional development of teachers, administrators, and School Board members. Decisions about whether the teachers receive a raise or more books are purchased must be made simultaneously. This is a particularly pressing problem, of course, in a time of scarce resources and rapidly expanding enrollment.

We urge the Superintendent and the School Board to establish in each year a clear set of all priorities based on projected funding and, furthermore, to establish, with the Providence Teachers Union, a different calendar for salary negotiations.

Recommendation 13. Allow Principals to Choose Their Staffs

Recommendation: Principals must have the power to choose their schools' assistant principals and secretaries. To this end, in each school the principal must be authorized to:

- *develop a detailed job description and posting that outlines specific needs (expertise, experience, and other special skills could be included);*
- *choose finalists after reviewing dossiers, sent by the personnel office, of candidates who work in the system and candidates from outside the system; and*
- *interview finalists and send the name of their choice to the appropriate assistant superintendent, who will notify the selected candidate.*

Providence principals complain bitterly that they cannot run their schools effectively because they do not choose—indeed, they have no input whatsoever—in choosing the support staff members who work in their schools. Overwhelming majorities of principals believe that their schools would be more effective if they could choose the people with whom they work. Virtually no other institution expects executives to accept assistants or secretaries without some input in the decision. If principals are to be accountable to the community, they must have this simple but important prerogative.

Recommendation 14. Revise Accountability of Custodial Services

Recommendation: The system's custodial services must either be privatized or reformed drastically so that principals have direct authority (including termination) over those who clean school buildings. The new services must include clear and detailed guidelines for cleaning and *inspecting buildings. Custodians must become the first line of defense in building maintenance.*

Specialized maintenance services must continue to be privatized. If the time it takes to respond to a maintenance request is not reduced significantly, current private contracts must be terminated and new contracts negotiated.

The process for resolving grievances concerning maintenance must be redesigned so that it ceases to involve the Superintendent and the School Board. These officials must have more time to work on issues of educational substance.

The cleanliness of school buildings runs the gamut from exceedingly clean to distressingly dirty. PROBE's research documented this in many ways, ranging from interviews with teachers, students, and principals to on-site visits.

One-half of the teachers (50%) feel that their school is usually clean, while just less than one-half (43%) disagree. Comments from teachers differ from building to building. Some feel that their buildings are clean and custodians are hard-working; others are angry that their buildings are always dirty and their janitors are hard to find.

> *"I am greatly pleased with the care the school receives."*
>
> —An elementary school teacher

> *"Many classrooms are a disgrace, especially the special education classrooms."*
>
> —An elementary school teacher

> *"I have an exceptionally good (thorough, helpful, capable, intelligent) custodian in my part of the building."*
>
> —A middle school teacher

> *"Regular custodians do whatever they can to do as little as they can. Per diem custodians are the most helpful."*
>
> —A middle school teacher

PROBE's visits to schools only further substantiated the enormous differences among schools; for example, Windmill Street Elementary School was remarkably clean, yet trash and dirt littered the halls and grounds of Bridgham Middle School.

A principal's lack of authority allows some buildings to remain dirty. While they do have the authority to create a work schedule for custodians, principals do not have the right to sanction or remove custodians who are ineffective. Consequently, many principals assert that the cleanliness of their building depends on the custodians' attitude. Principals must be given the authority to make something happen if their school is not clean.

Maintenance requests pose an even greater problem for Providence schools. Sixty percent of Providence teachers are dissatisfied with the time it takes to get something repaired. Many teachers note horror stories about maintenance.

> *"I file a work report with the principal, but it takes forever to accomplish the task. For example, in February, the locksmith came and removed a jammed lock in one door and as of June, it hasn't been replaced. Windows have been broken for over a year!"*
>
> —An elementary school teacher

> *"The radiator drips into a bucket that I empty daily. This problem was put in writing to the principal 18 months ago."*
>
> —A middle school teacher

> *"I've had lights out for two years—no response yet."*
>
> —A high school teacher

> *"My ceiling crumbled and roof leaked for years—nothing happened."*
>
> —A high school teacher

Principals agree that getting work orders filled takes too long. Seventy percent believe that "too much of my time is spent taking care of school facility problems." When principals were asked which four activities consumed the largest portion of their time, more than one-half (53%) cited maintenance. One principal summarizes the feelings of many when he writes, "Why am I a maintenance director instead of a principal?"

The Providence School Department is moving gradually toward the privatization of maintenance services. Specialty services such as roof repair, plumbing, and heating are increasingly provided by private contracts overseen by the city's Director of Public Buildings. Because the original system of maintenance—in which the School Department employees were responsible for most maintenance—was so ineffective, PROBE believes the increasing privatization of maintenance services is a good step toward accountability and faster services. Nevertheless, clearly, more progress must be made.

Finally, PROBE urges that a new system be developed to address teacher grievances, particularly grievances relating to maintenance. During the 1991 calendar year, teachers filed 234 grievances; more than one-third related directly to maintenance and facilities. Most of these grievances were open-and-shut: a teacher, dissatisfied with how long a repair was taking, filed a grievance. (Indeed, many principals openly acknowledge that they *ask* teachers to file grievances to receive speedier responses.) In 1991, the Superintendent heard grievances that addressed many different problems including a lack of heat in a building, broken faucets, falling ceiling tiles, an inoperable stove in a home ec room, pigeon droppings over the door of an elementary school, an inoperable kiln in an art room, broken fire doors, and a broken intercom system.

Unfortunately, as the system is structured currently, most grievances ultimately require a formal hearing attended by the Superintendent, the Teachers Union President, an assistant superintendent,

a principal, and the teacher who filed the grievance. Consequently, the Superintendent spends an estimated two afternoons of every school week listening to grievances that usually are easily settled. The Superintendent estimates that 10% of his time each week is spent in hearings, and many more hours of time of senior administrators are spent preparing for the hearings.

Participatory Processes

Recommendation 15. Organize Regular Discussion Sessions for Teachers

Recommendation: Teachers within each school must have regularly scheduled opportunities to discuss topics they consider important. These sessions can, on occasion, be combined to bring together teachers from different schools and different levels. These meetings will:

- ❖ *provide an informal forum for sharing ideas, experiences, successes, and concerns;*
- ❖ *promote communication among teachers/schools of different levels; and*
- ❖ *promote creative learning projects across grades and levels.*

These meetings must be held either before or after school during the additional time made available by Recommendation 4.

Lack of communication is the concern most often expressed in every teacher discussion at every level. In particular, teachers want a time to talk informally together in their schools. As one elementary school teacher says, "Professional interaction is not available to us." Teachers want to work together on curriculum and staff development; they want to work together to solve the problems they face in their classrooms. They also want a chance to discuss the ups and downs and the stresses of their work. One high school teacher states: "We don't have time to just sit and compare what's happening.... It's not built in."

The teachers see themselves as untapped resources, unable to share valuable experience and ideas. PROBE's recommendations provide many outlets for this energy and expertise: through involvement in planning school goals, in school governing cabinets, in school-specific staff development and curriculum development initiatives. A forum in which all faculty members in a school are encouraged to participate is also needed.

Many teachers feel their creativity has been stifled by a system in which their opinions and ideas are not valued. One teacher writes: "One of the major frustrations of teachers who care is that we are never allowed to voice our opinions in a forum that matters; our opinions and/or advice are never sought by administration; we are rarely, if ever, included in decision-making; and we are represented by a union whose philosophy we don't often share. Recognition must be given to the fact that the people who know a school best are the teachers. Everyone else—students and administrators—passes through it. We live there. If school change is ever to occur, our observations and suggestions must be given credibility."

Teachers find this situation frustrating because they know how great their contributions could be. In a call for sharing ideas, an elementary school teacher writes: "Get teachers within the same grade level together—teachers, we are our own best resources."

A forum must be established within each school for teacher renewal, revival of creativity, and resurgence of energy. Working in close association with such renewal would come a greater sense of shared professionalism. One teacher writes: "Treat teachers like professionals. *Actively* seek

their input in decision-making, brainstorm with them for ideas, encourage them to try new things and support them in this endeavor." The teachers value their accomplishments and those of their colleagues, but they are disturbed by media reports and public perceptions that belittle their efforts. Clearly, they need ways to develop a new level of pride in teaching as a profession.

This emphasis on pride emerges as well in an interview with the new president of the Teachers Union. When asked to identify her long-term priority (after two months in office), she replied, "I'd like to put back the feeling of pride." She went on to say that there is widespread suspicion among teachers. They don't feel safe trying new things, for example. She hoped that as some do try to make changes, others will gradually join in. We believe an open-ended, teacher-directed forum for sharing ideas and concerns is a step in that direction.

Joint meetings of the faculties of two schools, e.g., teachers from an elementary school and those from a nearby middle school, can build on this same pride. Such meetings will open new educational horizons and offer a view of the continuity of learning across levels. Two teachers advise:

> *"Teachers from different schools should meet once a month to get ideas on what other teachers in their grade are doing."*
>
> *"Pair up two schools to have teachers talk."*

Recommendation 16. Organize Student Committees

Recommendation: Each school or unit must organize committees in which students take the initiative to address key concerns or problems in their schools. These groups, comprised of students working with teachers, administrators, parents, and the community, could be used in many areas to promote student learning, responsibility, outreach to the community, and ideas for their own educational experience. Committees could be organized to:

- *identify and find solutions for specific problems that arise within the school, e.g., building cleanliness and student discipline;*
- *raise money for field trips and for projects to improve the appearance of the school; and*
- *explore other ways to give students an effective voice in decisions affecting the school.*

Results of our study indicate specific concerns about the need for cleaner, more attractive school buildings, better student discipline, more extracurricular activities, and more field trips. Table 5.3 lists some of the high school survey responses.

TABLE 5.3
STUDENTS' REACTION TO SCHOOL PROBLEMS

TABLE 5.3
STUDENTS' REACTION TO SCHOOL PROBLEMS

COMMENT	PERCENT WHO AGREE
My school is clean.	29%
It's too easy for outsiders to come into my school.	61%
Discipline is fair at my school.	48%

Students want to be able to express their opinions, to be heard, and to have their opinions valued. ALP students are among the few from whom we heard who feel that they have a voice in their education. They tell of close relationships with their teachers-advisors and of participation in classes and in various student committees that focus on specific issues of concern to students. Recommendations from these committees are presented to the principal, teachers, and other students in student town meetings. ALP students speaking about their experiences with the committees show pride in their initiative and their problem-solving abilities.

When asked about the opportunities they have to express their views and to have an impact on their school, ALP students mentioned repeatedly two concepts: the ***respect*** they feel from their teachers and fellow students, and the ***responsibility*** they are learning.

Although our supporting data come predominantly from the high schools, PROBE suggests that variations of these committees can be formed at the elementary school and middle school levels. Committees must be established in an effort not only to address school issues and to give a voice to students, but also as a method of developing students' thinking and problem-solving skills.

This approach also offers an excellent opportunity for parents, business partnership participants, and other community members to work with children in small, personal groups with clearly defined tasks and goals.

Recommendation 17. Establish Informal Student Town Meetings

Recommendation: Regular, informal student town meetings or smaller discussion groups must be sponsored in each unit within the schools. These meetings are to:

- ❖ *encourage all students to air concerns about their school experience and about school policies; and*
- ❖ *present action or proposals to the principal or school cabinet.*

Teachers, guidance counselors, and the principal must attend these meetings to facilitate the discussion and to hear what is said.

In a middle school focus group, a sixth grade student says that she wishes someone would really listen to her concerns. She describes a daily fight in the lunchroom, which she finds upsetting. On two occasions she went to the adult in charge and suggested that the reason for the fight is always the same—there are not enough chairs for the students. She says that this problem could be remedied easily. But nothing has been done. The fights continue, and she feels that she has been ignored.

Students at the large high schools say student government is an excellent idea, but one that lacks adult support. These students say there are many problems for which students could offer effective approaches. Both middle school and high school students complain about stifling rules and restraints placed on all students because of small groups of troublemakers in their schools.

A different picture is painted, however, by students at ALP In this unique environment, the students can help write the rules. Rules of behavior and many other aspects of the school environment have been developed through ALP's student town meeting. All 150 students attend these regular meetings along with teachers and the principal; anyone may raise and discuss any topic about the school. Students say the system they have developed is effective because they "own" the rules and

believe that they are fair. In addition, students enforce the rules of the school through their Student Review Board (SRB). Students who break rules (including failing to earn enough academic credits during a quarter) must appear before the SRB. The result may be a plan or contract for changed behavior or some other recommendation to the school principal.

Without exception, at the end of the student focus group meetings in the high schools and the middle schools, the students asked if there would be other meetings and said they enjoyed being able to express their views. A need exists within the schools for an ongoing process of listening to the students. The shape of this process depends on the age and composition of the student group. But the goals remain the same: student expression, student growth in problem-solving, self-esteem, a sense of responsibility, and a continuing measurement of the quality of the school climate.

Recommendation 18. Establish Informal Parent Town Meetings

Recommendation: Town meetings or talk sessions for parents must be sponsored within each school. These meetings should:

- *promote regular, informal discussion of concerns, and*
- *present ideas or concerns to the principal or governing body of the school.*

These discussion groups will need facilitators, preferably a combination of school personnel, e.g., principal, teacher, or guidance counselor, and a parent. Interpreters also must be available.

Ninety-three percent of the parents surveyed say they think parent involvement is important for children in school. Yet, a much smaller percentage of parents attend school functions or involve themselves otherwise in the schools. Clearly schools need to find nonthreatening ways to draw parents into the schools and to listen to their ideas and opinions. As a high school teacher explains: "Many parents are intimidated by school and what goes on here. Language barrier is often a problem. Most parents don't know that interpreters are available."

Some parents believe that people in the schools do not listen well. Fewer than two-thirds (63%) of the parents surveyed are satisfied with how their children's teachers listen to them. Fifty-nine percent are satisfied with how well the principal listens to them. An elementary school teacher says, "Many times the problems expressed by parents are frustrations with administration—busing, discipline, attitudes. Often they feel alienated by the school. Clearly most parents in my school are brushed off by school office staff and administration."

A different message is given to parents when they are invited to talk about their concerns (and in their own language)—a message that says that their opinions do matter.

Recommendation 19. Redesign Monthly Principal Meetings

Recommendation: The emphasis and procedure for the monthly meetings of principals and assistant principals must be changed in order to provide a more useful forum for these administrators. The rotating host principal will preside and, at the end of the meeting, will elicit suggestions from other principals for topics to discuss at the next meeting. The representative from central administration will serve as a liaison but will not set the agenda or control the direction of discussion. These meetings should:

- *provide an informal forum for sharing of ideas, experiences, successes, and concerns;*
- *promote informal mentoring and coaching;*
- *promote communication among schools in the city; and*
- *promote communication among administrators/schools of different levels.*

Building administrators (principals and assistant principals) currently attend regular monthly meetings with central administration, held at different schools every month. But 75% of the principals say these meetings do not provide the forum the building administrators need for effective communication among themselves. Several principals complain that the agenda for these meetings is set by the central administration and is usually dominated by administrative issues. An elementary school principal explains, "No opportunity is provided in the monthly meetings to discuss educational issues of common concern to all. The only issues shared or discussed are mechanical administrative issues: process for collecting lunch money, busing problems."

In general, principals comment frequently that their communication with central administration is almost always one way: from central administration to the principals. Many principals wish that central administration would listen more and talk less. Several say the informal setting of the focus group was helpful because they could talk about problems and help each other with their own experiences.

Principals welcome strategic planning and the process that had begun in the system this year with meetings of principals in the summer. These were seen to be helpful, but not enough: "We need to meet as a whole together. It is not sufficient the times we've met. That is not planning."

One principal mentions the importance of involving people from all levels in the strategic planning process. An example is given of planning specific content curriculum. The need is expressed for elementary, middle, and high school teachers and principals to plan together so that an integrated, consistent program results. "There has to be continuity for K–12."

Assistant principals cite the need for informal mentoring from other, more experienced administrators. This occurs sometimes within a given building, but it is often minimal or nonexistent either because there is only one administrator or because of the lack of time available. A regular, informal meeting of administrators will encourage mentoring relationships as well as simple networking. It will help also to combat the sense of isolation that many administrators feel. One principal says, "The isolation is hard. You start to have self-doubts with so many decisions to make."

School Goals

Recommendation 20. Establish Goals by and within Each School

Recommendation: In each school a collaborative effort must take place to design goals that give that school a clear direction in which to proceed and make that school more responsive to the specific needs and strengths of its students. In all schools, the principal will be responsible for leading the collaborative development and application of these clear and specific goals. These goals will be:

- *focused on student achievement and well-being;*
- *based on significant input from students, parents, teachers, other school staff, and the community;*
- *communicated to the school community;*

- ❖ *accompanied by specific, measurable objectives;*
- ❖ *assessed annually in a school progress report; and*
- ❖ *used as part of a system of principal and teacher accountability for meeting goals.*

Additionally, these goals incorporate the need for:

- ❖ *energetic outreach to parents that will demonstrate the school's recognition of the vital role parents play in education and also ensure that parents recognize their responsibility to their children's education and schools;*
- ❖ *enriching the curriculum and school environment based on the cultural diversity of the students and their families; and*
- ❖ *establishing more effective working relationships with social services agencies serving the students and their families.*

Without goals, any organization will struggle to maintain a focus or direction. Schools need a clear direction that will guide the principal, the teachers, the parents, and the students. PROBE has found many hard-working, committed people who are often unable to look beyond their immediate crises or tasks at hand. We have heard little about a concerted effort by everyone in a school toward clear goals that are owned and valued by all.

Over the past year, central administration has provided time and training for school principals to begin work on clearly defined school missions. These efforts have fallen flat in many cases; some schools, however, apparently have made progress. Several possibilities might account for this lack-luster record—lack of time to communicate, lack of input from the people on the front lines in the schools, and a paucity of educational leadership in the schools and in the system.

In order for missions or goals to motivate people and serve as useful guidelines for planning and action, they must reflect the experience, knowledge, and values of principals, teachers, other school staff, parents, and students. All of these people must own the key goals. But, currently, few people in the schools feel they have enough influence to help frame the learning experience. They believe that their potential is not being tapped adequately. This is true for principals who want to be educational leaders, for teachers who want to share ideas with other teachers in their school, and for students who are ready to suggest ways to make their learning more challenging.

In order for goals to have an impact on schools, the leadership must be strong and articulate. Teachers and principals believe that leadership of the schools needs strengthening. Only 29% of the principals measure the central administration as "somewhat effective" in vision and leadership. Similarly, 32% of teachers indicate that they are either extremely or somewhat satisfied with central administration leadership. The figure is higher when it comes to leadership of individual schools, with 65% of the teachers stating that they are somewhat or extremely satisfied with the leadership of their particular school.

PROBE's results indicate that the time is right and the people are more than ready to pursue common goals. No one group of people involved with the schools believes that they are currently spending their time as they should be. For example:

❖ Ninety-six percent of the principals surveyed think it extremely important for the principal to be an educational leader in the school. And yet, they indicate that the four activities that they allow to consume most of their time are paperwork, maintenance, lunchroom duty, and discipline.

❖ Sixty-six percent of the teachers say they would like to have outside resource people speak in classes more often. On the other hand, 65% of the high school students say this happens seldom or very seldom in most of their classes.

❖ Academic area supervisors in the central administration indicate through their focus group that they are able to spend little of their time doing the creative curriculum development work for which they believe they were hired.

❖ The Superintendent devotes the better part of one day each week to grievance hearings.

We hear rarely about proactive behavior—trying new methods, taking risks, learning from both success and failure. This happens when people venture forth bound by common goals, not by "the way things have always been."

Sometimes it takes courage to break out of old patterns, e.g., teachers lecturing, principals pushing papers, students creating discipline problems to avoid boredom, parents avoiding the schools, School Board members sitting in judgment rather than helping things happen, central administrators accepting fire fighting as the way to spend their time. Clear goals to which all are committed can provide the incentive and the support.

PROBE has found a particular need to set goals in three major areas: outreach to parents, cultural diversity, and use of social services.

Outreach to Parents

PROBE notes a general consensus about the importance of parental involvement in the schools:

❖ Seventy-one percent of principals believe that schools should offer programs for parents. (Some principals report that they are already doing this with success.)

❖ Eighty-eight percent of the teachers surveyed agree that a child is more likely to succeed if the teacher and parents meet and talk.

❖ Ninety-three percent of the parents think that parent involvement is important for the children in a school.

PROBE asked parents whether they feel welcome in the schools. Seventy-eight percent said they do. Some schools attract parents by providing useful services; Carl Lauro Elementary School and William D'Abate Elementary School, for example, provide a room (Parents Center) where parents can meet, borrow books, and attend parent education workshops.

The topic in one of the teacher focus groups turned to the large number of parents who avoid the schools because they feel intimidated. One teacher comments: "Parents have fears or negative feelings held over from their school days. Usually they are only called here for problems." Teachers say they need to help parents overcome these feelings, to find nonthreatening ways to bring parents into the school. Some mention inviting parents for lunch, breakfast, or coffee; to draw or read with the children; or to join them at recess.

The most common reasons parents give for not attending parent/teacher conferences are the inability to understand the teacher (21%) and not enough prior notice (20%). The most common reasons for not being involved in other school activities are work requirements (17%), lack of invitation (13%), and difficulty in understanding English (13%). Communication with parents who speak limited or no English is a serious concern, especially when recruiting parents to become involved in school activities. Difficulty in understanding English is cited as a reason for not becoming involved by 47% of Asian parents, 23% of Hispanic parents, and 25% of parents from other ethnic groups.

Some schools have made progress in this area. For example, PTO meetings at Roger Williams Middle School are usually held in Spanish and English. At a recent PTO meeting at the Carl Lauro Elementary School, parents were assured that they do not have to speak English in order to become an officer. In addition, evening and weekend multicultural events, such as provided by Hopkins Elementary School and D'Abate Elementary School, are drawing many parents. One teacher suggests: "Open house should be made into a 'big night.' The students should plan the night and include entertainment. Other schools have had huge turnouts because it was a family night and many students were involved in planning."

Goals for parent outreach may vary according to the current programs and needs of each school community. In informal conversations and focus groups, parents, teachers, principals, and administrators offer some suggested ways of improving school outreach:

- ❖ periodic discussion groups of parents arranged by school leaders, including groups held in Spanish and other languages;
- ❖ parent advocates available in the school to talk with parents and to work with them and school personnel to address concerns;
- ❖ a parent center in the school offering parent training, General Equivalency Diploma (GED) coursework, English as a Second Language (ESL) training, life-skills training, and support groups;
- ❖ school sponsorship of more evening activities (art, music, sports) that involve students and that encourage teachers to converse informally with parents;
- ❖ improved communication with parents who speak little or no English, e.g., translated newsletters and more publicity regarding the availability of interpreters; and
- ❖ staff training in more active outreach to parents.

Using Diversity as an Asset

The racial/ethnic composition of the student population in Providence has changed dramatically over the last 10 years and is one of the most diverse in the country.

High school students tell us how much they like the students at their school, how much they like getting to know such a diverse group of students, and how much they learn from each other. This is especially emphasized by students at Hope and Central. In the survey, 70% of the high school students agree that they like most of the students at school; 61% say that students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds get along well in their school. When asked what they like best about school, three high school students stated:

"The people. Everyone likes each other! They don't care what race you are!!!!"

"The diversity of the students. I think we learn from each other rather than in the classroom to an extent. The knowledge we get from each other helps make the learning easier and you get more out of it."

"The feeling of equality."

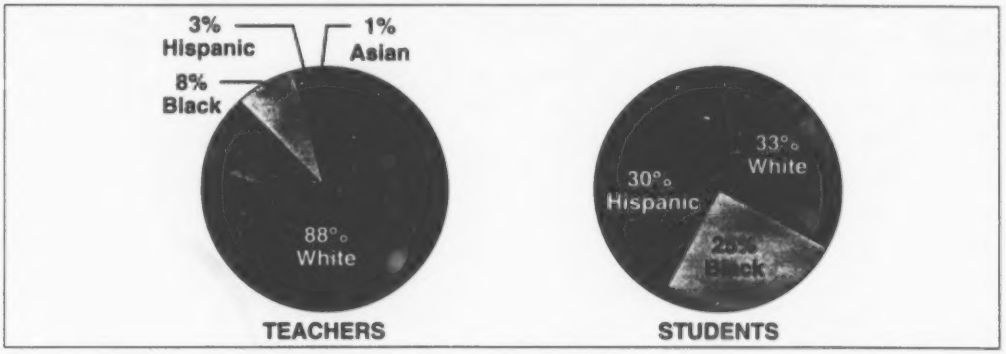
When students rate themselves on various skills, they give themselves the highest ratings on getting along with different kinds of people. One student sees experience with a diverse population as particularly important: "Our school is racially diverse, and I feel that this will help me prepare the most for my future. Being able to associate with people from all racial backgrounds has enabled me to be exposed to all walks of life."

Students in one of the focus groups carried on a lengthy and lively discussion of racism generally and racism within the school. What is perhaps of most interest is the open, candid way these students talk about a serious and volatile topic. They show respect for each other and their differing views. One student concludes: "I think a lot of people here want to get to know different nationalities."

Students do, however, mention with some concern what they perceive to be racist behavior by some teachers. In one focus group students spoke at length about the problem of teachers stereotyping students based on their clothes or racial/ethnic background. One girl says her teachers think "if you're Hispanic you sell drugs and if you're black you're in a gang. I feel that they want white kids in class. A lot of times, the stereotype influences how they think you do your work...." An Asian student adds, "Some teachers do not care, especially if you are from a different culture."

In fact, the composition of the teaching force in Providence differs significantly from that of the students (see Figure 5.2).

FIGURE 5.2
COMPARISON OF 1991–92 RACIAL/ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS



Teachers speak readily about diversity. They are frustrated with trying to teach children whose skills in English are weak. But 77% of teachers say they find racial/ethnic diversity among students in their classroom an asset. Teachers plead for information and training about different cultures so they can help the children more effectively. Fifty-two percent indicate they need training in how to teach students from many different backgrounds.

When responses to the parents' survey are compared by racial/ethnic group, statistically significant differences emerge on most questions. Parents from different groups have differing perceptions of the schools and the education provided. For example, when parents are asked if they are satisfied with the academic challenges offered their children, 42% of black parents say no, in contrast to 33% of white parents, 29% of "Other" parents, 20% of Asian parents, and 17% of Hispanic parents. Schools need to be aware that the experiences of the students and their families can vary greatly.

Parents appreciate the racial/ethnic diversity among students in their children's schools. One parent writes: "I feel it is a benefit to our community to have such a mix but only wish we could capitalize on bringing our youth closer together and bridge the racial differences that 'they have learned' and help them to become one in a concerted effort in their educational aspirations." A parent of a high school student writes: "There is a great deal of cultural diversity—a microcosm of the real world our children will face—opportunities to learn about other cultures."

Almost one-half (45%) of the parents disagree or are uncertain that children of different races are treated equally in their children's schools. In addition, 32% of parents indicate that they are dissatisfied with the number of minority teachers in their children's schools, with 35% satisfied and 33% undecided.

One parent wrote the following comments concerning the need for changes in curriculum that would reflect the changing composition of the student population: "I would like to see included in the curriculum more about immigrants and their culture, history, literature, way of life, and more important the real reasons for why we immigrate to the United States. That would not be beneficial only to the minorities, but would make the whites remember that they too were immigrants once, and those children will grow with more understanding and knowledge in dealing with the minority children. I am an immigrant, but my children are as American as most."

Goals for enriching the curriculum and school environment based on the cultural diversity of the school population may vary among individual schools according to the current programs and needs of that school community. Parents, teachers, principals, administrators, and students offered the following as some suggested ways to do so:

- ❖ incorporate cultural interests and backgrounds of the students into the curriculum with discussions and projects stemming from the curriculum;
- ❖ invite parents or groups to the school to share a particular aspect of their culture with students and staff;
- ❖ develop foreign-language programs for students, school staff, and parents so that they are exposed to the languages of the school population, can use them even at a minimum, and gain further awareness of the difficulties involved in communicating in another language; and
- ❖ provide activities in the school that showcase the arts of different cultures and the talents of the students from these cultures.

Drawing Social Services into the Schools

Only 18% of the teachers surveyed agree that the social services needs of the students in their schools are being met. Teachers and administrators indicate enormous concern for better student and family access to needed social services. As one principal says, "The reality is that schools replace homes...that we are a social agency."

PROBE recognizes that some Providence schools and the populations they serve have greater social and health services needs than others. Recommendation 32 outlines a plan for providing on-site services within a small number of schools whose needs appear to be the greatest.

PROBE also recognizes that better linkages with social and health services agencies are important for all schools and that goals must be designed to meet individual school needs. As Providence schools create smaller, more personal social units within the schools and teachers renew their role of student advisor-advocate, student needs can be identified and addressed more readily. In order for this to happen, however, teachers and other staff, students, and parents must be well-informed about available services.

In informal conversations and focus groups, parents, teachers, principals, and community agency staff suggest ways to improve provision of services to students and their families, for example:

❖ Schools establish direct contact with appropriate health and social services agencies and establish a liaison at the school and at the agency. The school liaison may be the principal, a teacher, a guidance counselor, a social worker, a school secretary, or a parent volunteer. Questions about services as well as student referrals are channeled through the school liaison.

❖ Schools request that agencies provide for the schools free information sessions and written materials explaining available services and how to use them. Materials must be written in simple, clear language and translated into foreign languages as required by the readers.

School-Based Management

Recommendation 21. Establish Site Management at Five Prototype Schools

Recommendation: School-based management must be implemented in a minimum of five Providence schools, including at least one school at each level. This more democratic and inclusive approach to governance of individual schools is designed, above all, to create schools that are more responsive to the specific needs and strengths of their students.

In addition to the collaborative goal-setting recommended for all schools, the school-based management model delegates critical decision-making power to the school cabinet. This group of nine to 15 people will include the principal, teachers, professional staff, parents, community members, and, if a middle school or high school, students. The school personnel on the cabinet cannot be more than one-half of the membership plus one, that is, if the group has 11 members, no more than six can be employees of the school.

The aims of the school cabinet are to:

- ❖ develop and use the resources of the parents, teachers, and business and other community members to enhance the learning of children and to make the school environment and curriculum more reflective of the community;
- ❖ provide the shared decision-making authority that will facilitate the implementation of specific school goals and plans;

- ❖ help the principal find effective ways to manage school business so that he or she can concentrate on being an educational leader; and
- ❖ build a strong sense of ownership and pride in the school on the part of the parents, professional and support staff, teachers, students, and community members.

The responsibilities of the school cabinet will be to:

- ❖ establish primary goals for the school;
- ❖ identify and develop valid measures of the school's progress toward its primary goals;
- ❖ prepare data measuring school progress and present the data to the school community in annual reports;
- ❖ prepare a budget of all school spending, taking into account the goals of the school;
- ❖ make personnel and staffing decisions that directly support the goals of the school; to wit:
  - -Teachers: A Cabinet subcommittee, which includes the principal, teachers, parents, and community members, will interview new and transfer teacher candidates screened by the personnel office. The candidate chosen by the subcommittee will be hired. The Cabinet will not have the authority to dismiss teachers.
  - -Principals: When a principal is hired, the procedure will be the same as that used to hire teachers. In addition, the Cabinet may submit to the Superintendent a vote of concern regarding the performance of a principal.
  - -Other staffing: The Cabinet may present requests for needed changes in staffing to the Superintendent and, through the Superintendent, to the School Board for approval.
- ❖ develop working relationships with social services agencies in the community; and
- ❖ petition, through the Superintendent, the School Board, and Board of Regents, for necessary waivers of city or state regulations.

The overarching goal of school-based management is to make schools more responsive to the unique needs and strengths of their students. This requires goal-oriented individuals who are committed to such responsiveness, who are willing to take on new responsibilities, and who are able to work cooperatively to build better schools.

Principals want to share decision-making and other responsibilities in their schools. Eighty-one percent of the principals surveyed say that working with a committee of teachers and parents to plan for their school would improve the quality of education. All believe they could improve the quality in their schools if they had a voice in the hiring of teachers. Ninety-five percent want a say in the hiring of assistant principals.

Principals would like to make their schools more responsive to the needs of their students. Seventy-five percent of the principals say that modifying the curriculum to suit the specific needs of their students would improve the quality of education.

PROBE heard a resounding cry from principals: above all, they want to be educational leaders. One principal says, "Even working a 12-hour day, six days a week, as I did this year, I could not rid myself of sufficient clerical and janitorial work to be an educational leader."

Principals want to spend more time planning and implementing educational programs and working with teachers and parents. When we ask principals which four activities they think

are most important, they are largely in agreement: 70% talk about planning and implementing programs; 60% cite staff discussion and interaction; 55% mention instructional supervision; 40% include meeting with parents.

School-based management requires that teachers work collaboratively—something many Providence teachers say they are eager to do. They want to work together to develop a curriculum that addresses the needs and interests of their students. They want to cooperate on the design and presentation of staff development programs; 73% of teachers surveyed express a desire to see teachers in their schools develop their own training workshops.

Another key to the success of school-based management is the interest of parents. Ninety-three percent of the parents surveyed believe that parental involvement is important for the children in a school. Almost one-half of the parents say they are dissatisfied with the impact they can have on the quality of education in their children's schools. About one-half of the parents see a need for more parent involvement in the development of school policies, and a need for parents to work with the principal and teachers to develop curriculum, policy, and budget.

Students can also be an important part of a school-based management team. At most Providence high schools, students are frustrated by an inability to help shape their educational experience and learning environment. This frustration is not apparent, however, at ALP where students enjoy some control over their environment through student committees and student town meetings.

School-based management allows the community to become more involved in the schools. In turn, the students must be encouraged to become involved in their community. Teachers and students talk with excitement about their opportunities to use community resources—and they ask for more. Most (81%) high school students say that in most of their classes they seldom go on field trips. A clear majority (65%) say they seldom hear outside speakers in most of their classes.

Teachers, at all levels, also want to reach out more into the community. Sixty-six percent talk about having more outside speakers visit; 55% say they want more opportunities to take their classes into the community.

During the past year, Providence teachers and principals have labored to craft a mission statement for each of their schools. This effort is an important initial step in the direction of school-based management.

Models

Many systems throughout the United States have experimented with school-based management. Large-scale initiatives have been undertaken in Chicago, Miami, and Louisville. Success, struggle, and impasse can be anticipated. The same can be said of the Flynn School Cabinet in Providence, now in its third year. The Cabinet at Flynn is a vehicle that enables parents and teachers to work with the principal to improve education in their school.

Nationally, we have seen as many approaches as there have been initiatives. The Louisville model emphasizes professional development. In Miami and other districts, cooperation among management and union officials has allowed a variety of school-based management plans to develop within the system. Using governance cabinets of similar composition, Denver and Philadelphia have reported positive results in the early stages.

Restructuring Schools: The Next Generation of Educational Reform, by Richard F. Elmore Associates (1991), a study of recent efforts, offers some practical advice:

- ❖ provide leadership through focus on student learning, commitment to change, goal-setting and assessment, risk-taking, and shared decision-making;
- ❖ create new organizational structures, roles, ways of communicating, alliances;
- ❖ provide time to create better learning environments for children—time for planning, risk-taking, redefining roles, and making changes and awaiting results;
- ❖ provide essential professional development; and
- ❖ seek supplementary funding, especially for professional development.

Steps toward Implementation

School-Based Management Task Force. PEF will establish a task force made up of PEF Board representatives, selected PROBE commissioners, the Superintendent of Schools, the President of the Teachers Union, the President of the Administrators Union, one volunteer teacher from each level, one parent from each level, and three other members from the community at large. The following outlines the tasks of this group.

Invitation to Schools. The Task Force offers a one-day seminar to outline how school-based management can work in Providence schools. All Providence principals will be invited and encouraged to bring several teachers and parents. Initial planning year grants will be limited to a few schools in the first year.

Schools Gather Support and Apply for Funding. Schools apply for funding by developing a brief outline of who will be on their planning team, what areas they hope to address and how instruction will be improved, e.g., by developing a Charter School, writing across the curriculum project, the Carnegie Plan, and literature-based curriculum. A process that involves low-income and minority parents should be emphasized. Applications for funding must acknowledge that the principal and 75% of the teachers agree to be involved.

Selection. The Task Force will review applications, interview teams, and select a few schools for initial planning year grants.

Initial Planning Year. With a planning year grant of between $10,000 and $20,000, school teams will develop extensive educational plans and goals for the coming year. Planning grant money will be used to give team members time to meet, to bring in consultants on curriculum and learning, and, in all cases, to train the team in cooperative decision-making. A meeting of the school's entire faculty must be held and 75% of the faculty must approve the plan before it is submitted to the Task Force.

Additional Funding. Schools submit plans to the Task Force, which will review the plans and interview teams. Approved plans will be awarded a three-year grant of up to $50,000 each year to carry out the plans. Continued funding will depend on the submission and approval of an annual report.

Annual Reports. An annual report of the progress each project has made toward achieving initial and additional goals will be prepared and distributed each May.

IMAGINE WHAT YOU WILL SEE IN THE PROVIDENCE SCHOOLS...

...WHEN RESOURCES CHANGE

Professional Development and Evaluation

Recommendation 22. Institute Professional Development and Evaluation of School Board

Recommendation: The School Board must codify immediately and clearly its purpose, its role in setting policy and in avoiding direct involvement in management, and its relationship with the Superintendent and the Mayor. In particular, the School Board must clarify its responsibility for adequate communication with parents and its policy for communicating with the media.

The School Board must establish a program to focus and energize its approach to its responsibilities. This program must encompass a rigorous and continuing program of professional development, new member training, and School Board evaluation. It must encourage the exchange of ideas and communication with School Board members in other comparable districts. Private funds should be obtained and restricted to support the initial costs of the Board's professional development and evaluation.

The School Board must discuss and identify immediate- and longer-term goals that can be measured readily and assigned to the Superintendent as the basis on which to assess his performance.

Providence School Board members receive no preparation for their important responsibilities. After they are chosen by the Mayor and approved by the City Council, they find themselves responsible for a $120-million organization. The School Board offers its members no formal training, belongs to no professional organizations, and has no expectation that members will attend conferences or national gatherings involving urban school districts. When asked where School Board members receive direction on policy issues, one member responded, "Nowhere."

All members recognize that they are expected to be "responsive" to the requests of the Mayor. Some Board members stated that before they were nominated the Mayor asked them directly if they would be ready to support his requests.

Most School Board members say they want and need training and a clear sense of the Board's purpose. Most are unsure of the difference between policy-making and administration. Several Board members readily acknowledge their attempts to influence appointments and, at the request of parents, intervene directly at individual schools.

Confusion about the appropriate role of School Board members has generated conflict between the Board and the central administration—and focused attention on immediate problems instead of long-term solutions. In the words of one administrator: "A subgroup of the present Board wants to get into micromanagement. They use a strong-arm approach." Another administrator wondered, "What do they do? Do they set policy? Or do they get people jobs?"

Professional training will help the School Board recognize the responsibilities and the limits of its critically important role of establishing priorities and setting policy.

The School Board must also put into place a system for annual external and self-evaluation to appraise its performance and assess how well it is fulfilling its major responsibilities to oversee and communicate.

The Superintendent and the School Board must move immediately to produce a detailed long-range plan for the schools. The help of principals, teachers, students and their families, and community members must be included in this process. The plan must rely on demographic projections, research findings, and recommendations of the PROBE Commission.

The Superintendent's recent effort to develop a mission statement for the district is an admirable first step. Now the School Board must determine the most important, realistic goals, both for the short term (one to three years) and for the long term (five years and beyond). Priorities must be set, and progress toward these priorities must be assessed regularly and reported publicly. The Superintendent's annual evaluation must be based on his progress in realizing what the Board has chosen to emphasize.

Recommendation 23. Institute Professional Development and Evaluation of Central Administration

Recommendation: The Superintendent must devise and implement a continuing program of professional development for all central administrators. Leadership training, using data to make decisions, and coaching and evaluating personnel must be emphasized. The Superintendent must revise job descriptions so that they reflect districtwide goals.

He must also develop an effective system for evaluating central administrators. To devise successful programs for professional development and evaluation, the Superintendent must call on volunteer experts from business, higher education, and nonprofit social agencies.

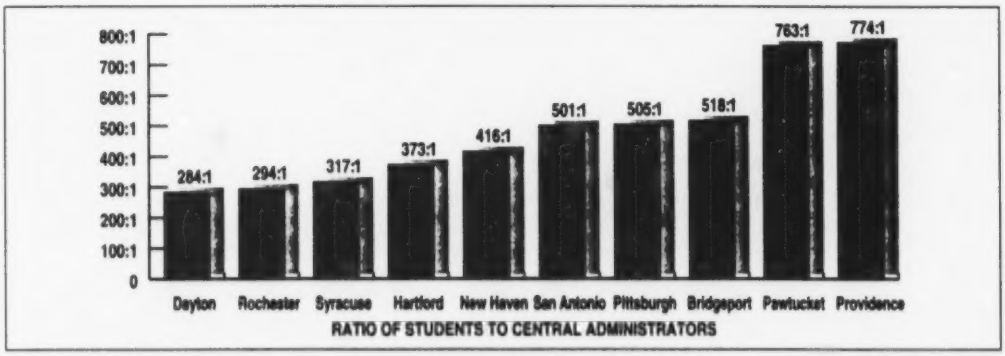
The Providence School Department has no effective system for evaluating central administrators and in recent years has not formally evaluated administrators at all. Most administrators want some kind of evaluation, and several emphasize the need for constructive criticism rather than simply a device that measures job performance. Most agree that almost no significant evaluation exists, mostly because "No one knows how to do it." One central administrator summarizes the situation this way: "Right now, there is no accountability. We should be measured on performance, responsiveness, and meeting goals."

In interviews and focus groups, Providence central administrators appear to be a somewhat tired and dispirited group. They commonly cite numerous, simultaneous responsibilities, frequent internal crises, and 60-hour weeks as the causes of their fatigue. Many say the central administration is understaffed, and PROBE's research lends some credence to that view. Among several comparable urban districts, Providence has the highest ratio of students to central administrators (see Figure 5.3). (Data are derived from a consistent definition of central administrator.)

Most central administrators offer high praise for the Superintendent, the 1992 summer workshop for central administrators, and the creation of a mission statement for the school system, which they believe have helped to clarify their roles and priorities. At the time of PROBE's research, however, most central administrators were uncertain about their priorities and frustrated that their many responsibilities make focusing on and finishing any one project impossible. "Everything starts up and then just dies," is the way one administrator describes it. Revised job descriptions based on new goals will help administrators make decisions regarding work that must be accomplished first.

Central administrators voice a strong desire for more professional training, especially in the areas of leadership, time management, collection and use of data, and developing supportive (rather than supervisory) relationships with principals and teachers. In each of these areas, professional development would help the administrators and the system.

FIGURE 5.3
RATIO OF STUDENTS TO CENTRAL ADMINISTRATORS



Recommendation 24. Institute Professional Development and Evaluation of Principals

Recommendation: The Superintendent, assistant superintendents, and principals must create a professional development program for Providence principals. The program must emphasize educational leadership and address the critical responsibilities of principals:

- *program planning and evaluation,*
- *staff discussions and interaction,*
- *instructional supervision and evaluation, and*
- *meeting with parents.*

Principals must be trained to advise and evaluate their teachers and to delegate less important duties that currently consume too much of their time. Parents, community members, and students can carry out effectively many of the tasks that now dominate a principal's day. Central administrators and principals must work together to develop a mentoring program for new principals and assistant principals.

The Superintendent and principals must develop an evaluation system that targets the most critical responsibilities of the principals. Evaluations must define ways to reward principals who are educational leaders and remove those who fail to lead and allow themselves to be overwhelmed by administrivia.

Providence principals face a bewildering array of responsibilities and competing demands. Although a large majority (90%) of the principals are at least somewhat satisfied with their jobs, most complain about the amount of work. One reason for the strain appears to be understaffing. Providence has many more students per principal than the average of 11 comparable districts. Whereas Providence has one building administrator for every 394 students, the 11 comparable cities have one building administrator for every 334 students.

Moreover, eight Providence elementary schools have more than 500 students with no other administrator except the principal. Several reports, including that of the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, recommend one administrator to every 333 students on the elementary level.

Providence's principals say their days are overrun by "administrivia." When asked what four activities take most of their time, principals give consistent responses: paperwork, maintenance, lunchroom duty, and discipline. Yet, the four activities they identify as most important are program planning and implementation, interaction with staff, instructional supervision, and meeting with parents.

To achieve excellence, Providence schools must have principals who can focus on these important activities. Principals cannot spend their days filling out forms and monitoring students during lunch hour. In the words of one principal, school officials must "review the definition of a principal for the '90s and beyond; redefine duties and responsibilities to release principals from service-oriented tasks (bus duty, lunch duties) to concentrate on education issues."

PROBE urges principals to involve the community in carrying out many of the chores that now inundate principals. Parents and community members can staff the lunchroom, help with the paperwork, and address some maintenance problems. While lending a hand, the community can reenter the schools in an important way.

Providence principals, like School Board members and central administrators, feel they do not receive adequate in-service training: 86% of principals say the training they received was either "extremely ineffective" or "somewhat ineffective," and 91% of the principals say they could have used the help of a mentor. One principal says, "Have meaningful workshops that address the day-to-day operations of a school. Bring in *real* people, not highly paid consultants who just add the Providence experience to their vita."

Providence principals are sharply critical of the current evaluation and promotion systems. Seventy percent of the principals believe that promotions reflect political connections rather than job performance.

> *"Advancements are not based on intelligence, exemplary job performance, or the ability to do...incredibly great...work. Extraordinary administrative vision and potential are a wasted human resource in the Providence School Department advancement structure."*
>
> —An elementary school principal

> *"I was naive. Until recently, I believed that in the end, the most qualified person got the job. Qualified people with no political pull are appointed positions that no one else desires. Decisions are made before the interviews are held."*
>
> —A secondary school principal

The system must develop a form of evaluation that rewards principals who use their time effectively—and removes those who do not.

Recommendation 25. Institute Professional Development and Evaluation of Teachers: Mentoring, Peer Coaching, Intervention, Recognition of Excellence

Recommendation: The Superintendent, Providence Teachers Union President, teachers, and community members, especially those with expertise in human resource development, must work together to develop:

- *a mentoring program that evaluates first-year teachers,*
- *a voluntary peer-coaching program for tenured teachers,*
- *an intervention program that facilitates the rehabilitation or termination of ineffective teachers, and*

❖ *a program at each school that annually recognizes at least one excellent teacher.*

Teacher evaluation in Providence is inadequate. The process fails to give teachers the feedback they need and protects a small minority of ineffective teachers who thus undermine public confidence in the schools. Dramatic changes must begin immediately.

Almost one-third (32%) of Providence's teachers reported that they were not observed or evaluated by anyone—even a colleague—during the entire 1991–92 school year. Some teachers are deeply hurt by the fact that no one evaluates their work. Teachers speak repeatedly of their sense of isolation. Some say that the lack of feedback shows a disregard for teachers and teaching. PROBE recorded hundreds of comments on this topic. The following three are representative.

> *"I have not been evaluated in years. That's kind of scary, is it not? People I have known for years are always telling me that they know I do a wonderful job. Do I? Some days I am not even sure myself."*
>
> —An elementary school teacher

> *"Whatever happened to a kind word? 'Oh, by the way, you're doing a good job; keep it up. What can I do to help?' The only way teachers know they are doing a good job is if they get all the problem children. This really is too bad."*
>
> —An elementary school teacher

> *"In 21 years in the system, I have received three written evaluations. Two of them my first year and the other was based on a 10-minute visit. The principal came to my room with the PROBE group and said parents and kids were pleased. How would he know??? He never visits my class or discusses curriculum with me. This was just for show and it made me angry. I feel I teach in a vacuum most of the time."*
>
> —A middle school teacher

Many teachers express anger over the system's inability to recognize excellent teachers and to counsel out or fire incompetent educators. Responses are overwhelmingly clear: 91% of teachers believe that excellence is not recognized; 89% believe that incompetence is not addressed. Many blame principals for allowing incompetent teachers to remain, while others blame the Providence Teachers Union for vigorously protecting incompetent teachers. Only 30% of the principals are satisfied with the quality of evaluations they give to tenured teachers.

> *"Probably the most frustrating thing for a good teacher is to see that the deadwood gets the same rewards as the workers. Children can really be harmed by bad teachers."*
>
> —An elementary school teacher

> *"I have seen an incompetent teacher hold a job for years and barely show up for work! Horrible! And a disgrace to all of the other teachers."*
>
> —A middle school teacher

"Part of the reason that this school system works so poorly is that nobody who is tenured gets evaluated. If anyone dares to comment on anyone's teaching, [the President of the Teachers Union] is immediately phoned. And usually, the administration backs down. The administrators need to do more to know what's going on and to have the guts to do something when they should. The Union needs to stop protecting incompetents and stress 'responsibility' along with 'rights.'"

—An elementary school teacher

"Teachers are allowed to do nothing in their classrooms all year (for example: a teacher who spends class time stocking sodas in the school store), never attend required meetings, and never seem to be made to feel bad about this behavior. Good teachers are largely ignored."

—A high school teacher

"We need a system of meaningful evaluation.... I could be a blundering idiot with a fake B.A. and a forged certificate with an IQ of 68 and NOBODY would know. I have never been formally evaluated.... This is absolute craziness. Thank the union for this."

—A middle school teacher

The teachers' desire for more feedback and recognition of both excellence and incompetence reflects positively on them and provides an excellent opportunity for improving Providence schools. The administration, the union, and, most important, the teachers must work together to capitalize on this opportunity.

In order to provide teachers with the support and advice they need and want, we recommend the following four programs.

1. Institute a Mentoring Program that Evaluates First-Year Teachers

Many new teachers receive little guidance from other teachers, and most get only a one-time evaluation from their principal. This situation limits the professional development of new teachers and minimizes the likelihood that ineffective teachers will leave the system.

In the Toledo and Cincinnati school systems, innovative and effective programs help develop, nurture, and evaluate first-year teachers. These programs pair a new teacher with an experienced teacher-mentor whose only responsibility is to help and evaluate 14 new teachers each year. In their first year, new teachers are frequently visited, observed, and coached by the mentor. At year's end, the mentor and the principal present an evaluation of the new teacher to a management/labor advisory committee. Both cities have found that this program helps new teachers and provides an effective mechanism for removing those who are ineffective.

2. Institute a Voluntary Peer-Coaching Program for Tenured Teachers

Providence teachers want more opportunities to exchange ideas with other teachers and to receive reactions from colleagues who have watched them teach. "Sometimes you feel so alone," is

the way one high school teacher puts it; an elementary school teacher says, "Sometimes I feel like I am on an island with my kids."

PROBE addresses this debilitating isolation in many of its recommendations: breaking up large schools into smaller units, developing school-based management teams and advisory councils, allocating time for weekly faculty meetings. Teachers, however, can take a step on their own to end their isolation by developing a peer-coaching program. Clearly many teachers want such a program; 49% said yes, and many made pleas in written comments.

Using a design suggested by the National Education Association (NEA), many school systems have developed peer-coaching programs that have benefited their teachers. The cost of these programs, primarily for training, is relatively small because teachers participate voluntarily.

3. Create an Intervention Program for Ineffective Teachers

The inability to rehabilitate or terminate ineffective teachers generates a tremendous amount of anger from teachers and parents and undermines public confidence in the schools. Whether the fault lies with an overly effective union or feckless principals can be debated endlessly. A more important question is how to address the problem.

Again, in Cincinnati and Toledo, administrators, teachers, and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) union leaders have developed an effective intervention program. In these two cities, a principal or a union representative has the right to express to an administration/union committee concern about an individual teacher. That teacher is immediately notified by the committee and assigned a mentor, an experienced teacher who has applied for the year-round position and been appointed by the committee. For an agreed-upon period (usually six months), the mentor works intensively with the teacher in question. At the end of the period, the mentor and the principal make a recommendation to the committee either to terminate or to rehire the teacher. The unions have agreed not to appeal any decisions to terminate. To date, teachers, administrators, and unions are satisfied with the program.

Whether to replicate it exactly in Providence is not the point; something must be done as quickly as possible. The few should not tarnish the many.

4. Institute an Annual Program at All Schools to Recognize Excellent Teachers

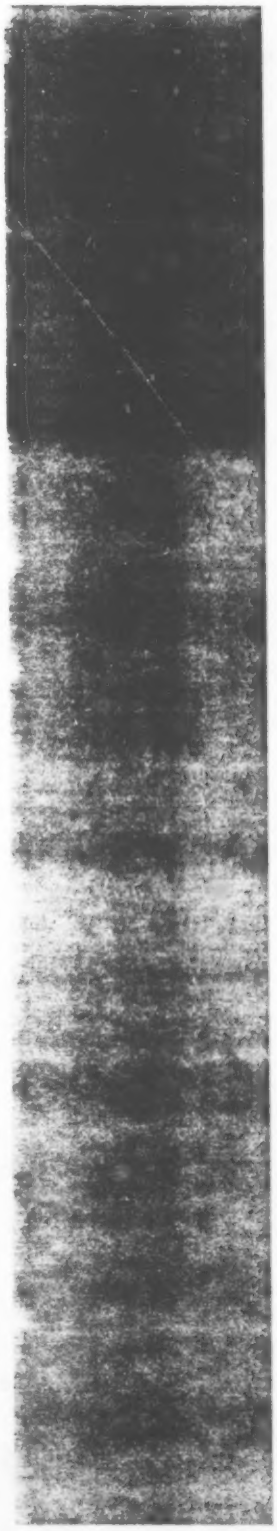
More than 90% of all teachers believe that excellence is not recognized. Some are resentful that their best efforts in a difficult job earn virtually no private or public notice. With a small donation, a company or individual could enable each of Providence schools to give a symbolic as well as a financial reward to an excellent teacher chosen by his or her peers at that school.

Recommendation 26. Institute School-Based Development Designed by Teachers

Recommendation: The Superintendent, the School Board, and the City Council must agree to provide funds for the professional development of teachers, either by reallocating existing funds or identifying new funds.

PROBE recommends that 1% of the total budget of the School Department be dedicated to professional development and that a large portion of these funds be allocated directly to individual schools and controlled by a committee of the principal and several teachers. These people will plan the staff development needed by their schools.

In order to achieve this goal, the Superintendent will appoint one administrator to work full-time as the coordinator of teacher development. The curriculum and program developers currently working in central administration will provide direct assistance, as requested, to individual schools under the supervision of this new coordinator of staff development. No additional personnel should be hired to achieve this goal.



Nearly all Providence teachers (94%) believe that training is important for their professional growth, yet only 26% believe that the in-service training they receive is meeting their needs. One high school teacher's comment is typical of what many teachers say: "Training is not a regular or planned part of the school culture." More than a dozen elementary, middle, and high school teachers wrote the same comment to our question about staff development: "What staff development?"

Teachers criticize staff development on two fronts: that it is not relevant to their particular student population and that it is delivered by someone who is out of touch with the realities of teaching in their school. Too often, teachers say, they are required to attend systemwide presentations that fail to address the unique needs of their students. An elementary school teacher wrote, "In-service training should focus on *our* particular populations and problems, focus on *our* neighborhood and its assets." Only 27% of the teachers believe they have adequate input into the design of their training. One teacher succinctly summarized the feelings of many: "I wish the administration would ask us what we need and not just tell us what we are going to get."

Many teachers feel that the people who conduct in-service training in Providence are poorly suited to the task:

> *"Workshops should be conducted by people who have successfully used the techniques in their classrooms rather than by resource personnel who are removed from the classroom."*
>
> —An elementary school teacher

Providence teachers want to develop some of their own training: 76% believe their colleagues have that ability and 73% would like to see teachers in their school develop training workshops. Extensive research over the last 20 years shows that "home-grown" staff development works. Teachers at Esek Hopkins and several other Providence schools have taken this approach and consider it successful.

Area supervisors interviewed by PROBE say they would relish the opportunity to survey the faculty about needs and then provide support for staff development within a school, in effect, helping to decentralize the system as well as allowing them to develop closer, more satisfactory relationships with individual schools.

The school system allocates less than $75,000 each year for staff development—less than one-tenth of 1% of the system's budget, less than $70 per teacher. Explaining the tiny allocation in this area of significant need, the Superintendent notes that every year the administration asks for more

money for staff development and every year the City Council reduces the budget request after questioning staff development. This is a denial of a major school responsibility and an opportunity for quality where it counts the most.

At its most effective, professional development is a responsibility of both the individual and the school. It is not a released-time shot in the arm but, for a true professional, a life cycle affording vigor and redirection. The teacher (as well as all others who participate in professional development) must supplement school programs by seeking enrichment in community experience and exploring widely new directions in education.

Recommendation 27. Institute New System for Teacher and Staff Evaluation and Termination for Unsatisfactory Performance

Recommendation: Providence Public Schools must implement a system that will ensure that its most effective employees are recognized and its least effective employees are identified, receive special attention and assistance, and, if improvement is not forthcoming, are terminated. To achieve this critically important goal, PROBE recommends the following.

❖ *The Superintendent, assistant superintendents, and principals must receive training in observing, coaching, and evaluating professionals.*

❖ *At the end of each school year, these supervisors must evaluate all the employees they supervise, using the following scale: excellent, satisfactory, below average, and unsatisfactory.*

❖ *The assistant superintendents and principals must share with their direct supervisors their evaluations as well as a detailed description of how they will assist the employees who received unsatisfactory or below-average evaluations.*

❖ *Employees who receive below-average ratings will receive special attention during the following year. Employees who receive unsatisfactory ratings are put on official notice that the School Department will terminate them if they receive an unsatisfactory rating at the end of the following year. (When teachers receive their first unsatisfactory rating, they will be placed immediately in the intervention program described in Recommendation 25.)*

❖ *The Providence Teachers Union, the Providence Administrators Union, the Superintendent, and the School Board must agree to carry out this system of evaluation and avoid, at all costs, hamstringing it with grievances, lawsuits, and pleas for exceptions.*

The lack of accountability has weakened the public's confidence in the Providence School Department and this, in turn, has undercut the public's willingness to support the schools. The lack of accountability also has undermined seriously the morale of the city's teachers, parents, students, and administrators.

PROBE's findings on the system's inability to address incompetence are overwhelmingly clear. Eighty-nine percent of the 806 teachers who responded to PROBE's survey believe that teacher incompetence is not

addressed. Teacher comments on this issue are numerous and passionate. Similarly, parents and especially students express frustration and anger about the system's inability to reform or to terminate incompetent personnel. Perhaps most telling of all, the former Director of Personnel and most principals acknowledge that they have virtually given up trying to terminate incompetent teachers because the current system is so time-consuming. Records show that over the last 10 years, fewer than 10 teachers have been terminated.

The system's inability to address incompetence is equally acute among administrators. In interviews and surveys, principals, central administrators, and School Board members express deep frustration about the inability to address incompetence within their own ranks. The School Board attributes much of its lack of trust toward the administration to the lack of accountability within the administration. The assistant superintendents and principals readily acknowledge that incompetence within their ranks is not addressed. Indeed, some believe that incompetence is subtly rewarded through the practice of reassigning ineffective principals or administrators to new positions with equal salary and fewer responsibilities.

The system described in our recommendation will work if all parties agree to it. In fact, this system is modeled after an effective system in place in Pittsburgh. Critical to its success, however, is the system's willingness to devote time and resources to those people who need help. Supervisors must be carefully trained in evaluation and coaching, and the supervisors must place high priority on assisting ineffective employees. The unions and the School Board must agree to support the process.

Increased Financial and Professional Resources

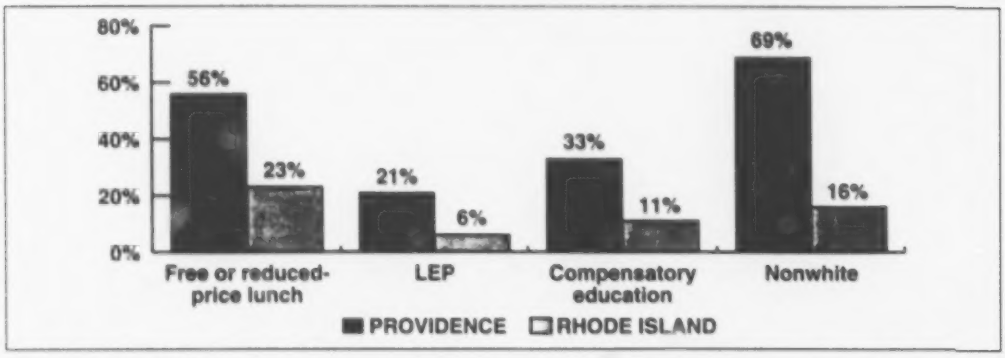
Recommendation 28. Implement 60/40 Funding for Providence and Guaranteed Student Entitlement

Recommendation: The Board of Regents and the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education must urge the Governor and General Assembly to make the following adjustments to the formula for state aid to public schools:

- *implement 60/40 state/local funding policy for Providence;*
- *eliminate the minimum guarantee so that state aid entitlement will be related directly to community wealth and income, and redistribute the aid, increasing funding for poorer communities such as Providence;*
- *reimburse school districts for special education expenses in the same proportion as their operation aid share ratio;*
- *reimburse school districts for 100% of all per-pupil special education costs in excess of 10-times the average per-pupil expenditure;*
- *ensure that local levels of support for education are maintained after these adjustments are implemented; and*
- *support the enactment of a guaranteed student entitlement program.*

Without question the Providence public schools face challenges unique to the state. In Rhode Island, Providence's schools have by far the largest number of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches because their family income is so limited. Providence public schools also have by far the highest percentage of children who require compensatory education, the highest percentage of children who require classes for LEP students, and the highest percentage of children who are nonwhite (see Figure 5.4).

FIGURE 5.4
COMPARISON OF STUDENT POPULATION VARIABLES: PROVIDENCE AND RHODE ISLAND



While the racial/ethnic and economic diversity of Providence students provides a rich opportunity for learning, educating such a diverse population is more complex and costs more than educating a homogenous population.

Educating a diverse student body is more costly for many reasons. Students who live in poverty generally require more health services, counseling services, and recreational and cultural activities. Children in poverty are far more mobile than other students; thus the School Department must spend more resources transferring records and rearranging bus routes. LEP materials are more expensive than materials used in regular classrooms, and LEP teachers need special training and aides to help them address the unique needs of students from a wide assortment of countries. Tests in Hmong, Cambodian, and Laotian are expensive to purchase and to evaluate. Parents whose first language is not English require more costly outreach efforts than English-speaking parents; memos cannot be sent home in one language, and translators must be available for conferences.

While the costs of educating such a diverse population are clearly higher than the costs in the typical Rhode Island community, Providence spends fewer dollars than the average Rhode Island district, according to *Looking at Results*, a 1991 report of the R.I. Public Expenditure Council (RIPEC). Whereas the average 1989–90 per-pupil expenditure in Rhode Island is $5,878, the average per-pupil expenditure in Providence is $5,702. Indeed, RIPEC reports that some Rhode Island districts that have few students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch as well as a generally homogeneous student population spend considerably more money than Providence (see Figure 5.5).

Despite its unique needs and challenges, Providence's per-pupil spending ranks in the bottom one-third of Rhode Island districts.

Providence taxpayers, however, pay a higher tax rate than most others in the state; indeed, according to RIPEC, Providence taxpayers pay the second-highest equalized tax rate in the state (see Figure 5.6).

While Providence spends less per pupil than suburban Rhode Island communities, it also spends less than comparable urban districts in other states. PROBE compared Providence's 1990–91 expenditures with those of 11 other urban districts with comparable student populations. PROBE found that Providence spends considerably less per pupil than the average of these 11 districts and nearly $1,000 less than the average of the eight districts in the Northeast (see Figure 5.7).

FIGURE 5.5
COMPARISON OF 1989–90 PER-PUPIL EXPENDITURES IN RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL DISTRICTS

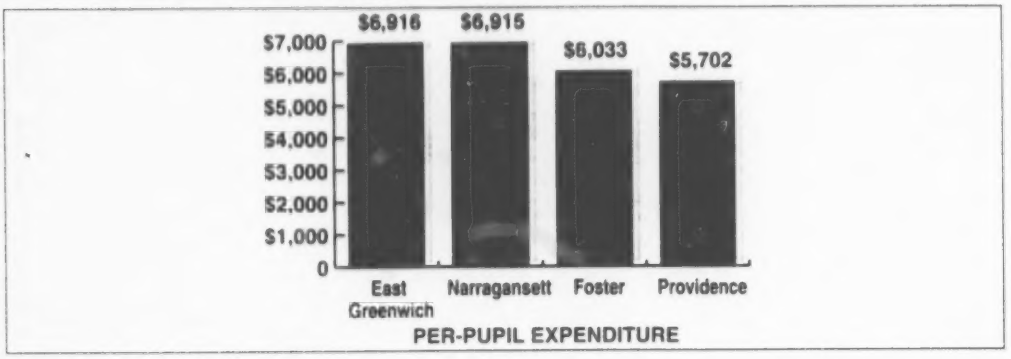


FIGURE 5.6
COMPARISON OF 1990–91 EQUALIZED TAX RATES IN RHODE ISLAND COMMUNITIES

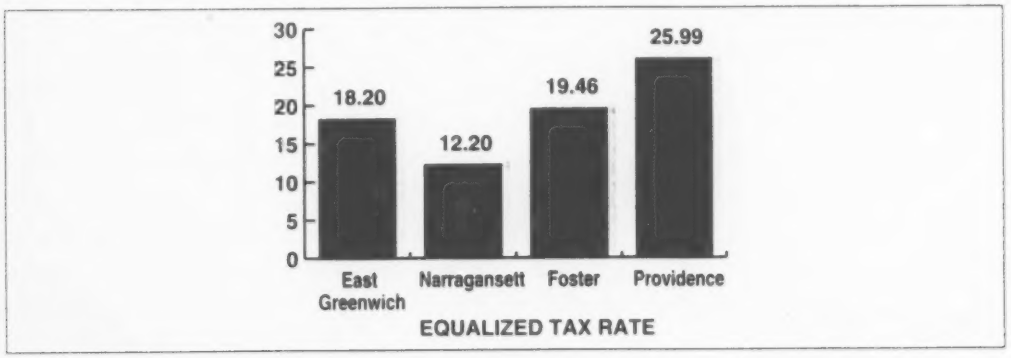
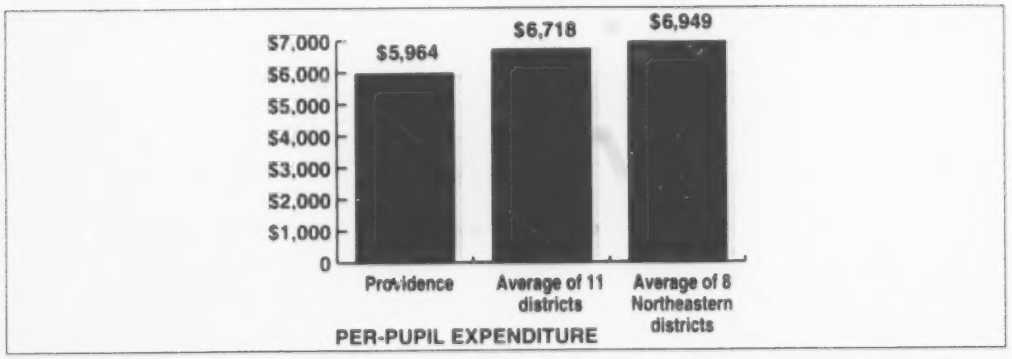
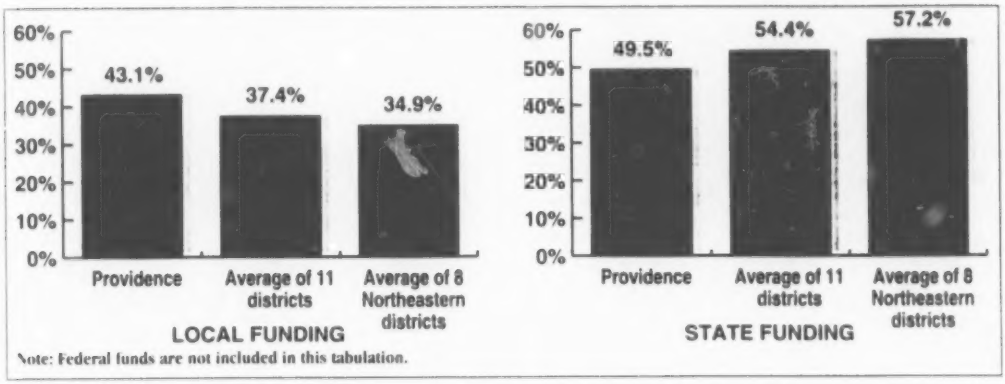


FIGURE 5.7
COMPARISON OF 1990–91 PER-PUPIL EXPENDITURES BY DISTRICT



The smaller per-pupil expenditure can be directly attributed to the smaller-than-average contribution that Rhode Island makes to Providence schools. On average, the other urban districts received a larger percentage of their funding from the state than Providence receives from Rhode Island (see Figure 5.8).

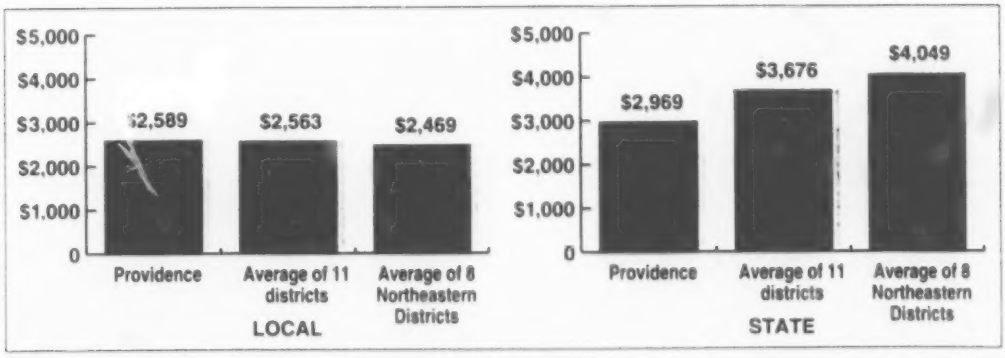
FIGURE 5.8
COMPARISON OF 1990–91 STATE AND LOCAL FUNDING RECEIVED BY COMMUNITIES



Note: Federal funds are not included in this tabulation.

In actual dollars, Providence taxpayers contribute more dollars per pupil than the other districts. Indeed, most of the difference between what Providence spends and what other districts spend can be attributed to state funding (see Figure 5.9).

FIGURE 5.9
COMPARISON OF 1990–91 PER-PUPIL EXPENDITURES BY LOCAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS



If our recommended changes in state aid formulas are made, Providence will gain about $22 million from the sources cited in Table 5.4.

TABLE 5.4
PROJECTED PROVIDENCE YIELD FROM REVISED STATE PROGRAMS

60/40 funding for Providence	$20,200,000
Eliminate minimum funding for wealthier districts and redistribute these funds to poorer districts	600,000
Reimburse special education at operations share ratio	1,500,000
100% reimbursement for special education students whose per pupil costs are more than 10 times average per pupil costs	70,000
Total	$22,370,000

With approximately 22,000 students in Providence public schools, these changes in state aid formulas would increase per-pupil spending by slightly more than $1,000, bringing Providence to the *average* of the comparable districts in the Northeast.

Recommendation 29. Hire Full-Time Grant Writer

Recommendation: The Providence School Department must pursue actively private and federal monies for educational programs. In order to do this, the School Department must obtain local private support for the cost for three years of a full-time School Department officer whose sole function is to pursue grant monies. This new officer must have extensive experience as a grant writer and a proven record of success. If after three years this position cannot fund itself, the development officer position should be eliminated.

During the last decade, the Providence School Department has funded several promising programs using grants from federal and local sources. For example, a federal grant funds the day-care center at Central High School, and a $1.2 million grant from the College Board funds Equity 2000, a program that enables *all* ninth graders to be enrolled in an algebra class.

These and other promising programs exist because the School Department is able to write effective grant proposals—or to team up with community agencies to write grants that will initiate programs in the schools. PROBE's research indicates, however, that the School Department is missing an opportunity to gain even more funding, particularly through local corporate sponsorship and private donations. The School Department has no experienced full-time grant writer; instead, writing grants is one of many responsibilities for several different administrators. Too often, the important task of writing grants is given to someone without experience or enough time to do the work effectively. Too often, these opportunities are lost. Moreover, the administrators who do write grants do not have sufficient time to train others—particularly principals and teachers—to write grants that could benefit their individual schools.

The Pittsburgh school district demonstrates what effective and aggressive grant writing can win for a system: from 1980 to1992, Pittsburgh received more than $30 million in grants and gifts from local, state, and national foundations and businesses. This remarkable success began when Pittsburgh's superintendent convinced a local company to pay one-half the salary of a grant writer and the School Board agreed to fund the other one-half.

Recommendation 30. Allocate Funds to Address Immediate Priority Needs

Recommendation: The allocation of funds in Providence's budget must address, in order, the following immediate priority needs:

- *purchasing books and materials (especially books and texts in the middle schools and high schools, trade books for the elementary literacy program, photocopy machines, laboratory supplies, language tapes, art supplies);*
- *funding professional development for teachers and principals in the following areas:*
  - *-collaborative learning methods,*
  - *-active learning techniques,*

-shared decision-making,
-coaching and mentoring peers,
-teaching students with diverse abilities,
-multicultural education,
-teaching students formerly in LEP classes, and
-conflict resolution;

- ❖ *developing a data collection system that connects all schools to each other and the central administration, and collects and disseminates the data that the Providence school system desperately needs to monitor progress and make appropriate decisions;*
- ❖ *funding professional development for School Board members and central administrators, and*
- ❖ *instituting a mentoring program for first-year teachers and intervention program for ineffective teachers.*

Inadequate funding of the five areas listed above strikes directly at the quality of education in Providence public schools. Of particular concern is the apparent lack of textbooks and materials in the schools. More than one-half of Providence's teachers (53%) believe that they do not have enough textbooks and slightly less than one-half (47%) report that they suffer from a lack of basic materials such as paper, pencils, and crayons. Comments from teachers spoke to the urgency—and the impact—of this situation.

> *"We need more basic materials. I am tired of buying my own pencils for the children."*
>
> —An elementary school teacher

> *"I received 30 paperback spelling books for each grade level this year. They are already either missing or a mess. Thirty books for 90 students?"*
>
> —A middle school teacher

> *"My science texts are 10 years old and 50% do not have covers."*
>
> —A middle school teacher

> *"I realize that budget problems exist, however, every other profession has copy machines and phones to meet their needs."*
>
> —A middle school teacher

> *"I have 50 books to teach 1,000 students a year."*
>
> —A high school health teacher

Providence allocates less than $30 each year per student for books and less than $35 each year per student for materials. By using grant monies from the federal and state governments, Providence is able to spend $114 for books and materials per pupil. This, however, is still 20% less than the $141 national average expenditure for books and materials. It should be noted that many teachers feel the shortage of books is caused, at least in part, by careless students. Several teachers suggested instituting a book deposit fee that would encourage students to be more careful with their books.

The four other areas of extreme need are discussed in other sections of this report: professional development of teachers in Recommendation 26 and principals in Recommendation 24; development of a data collection system in Recommendation 36; professional development of School Board members in Recommendation 22 and central administrators in Recommendation 23; mentoring and intervention programs for teachers in Recommendation 25.

Recommendation 31. Encourage Community to Donate Expertise and Facilities

Recommendation: To assist the schools, the community must donate expertise and advice and provide learning opportunities for students. Parents; R.I. Department of Education, colleges, and universities; cultural institutions; the business community; and health and social services agencies must reach out to the Providence School Department and provide pro bono assistance in the following and other areas.

Parents

- ❖ provide translating/interpreting services
- ❖ become parent advocates in schools
- ❖ offer parenting workshops
- ❖ assist with public relations
- ❖ work on school governance cabinets
- ❖ share culture and language with students and teachers
- ❖ assist with fundraising efforts
- ❖ volunteer as needed

R.I. Department of Education and Colleges and Universities

- ❖ provide training resources
- ❖ act as clearinghouse of educational research and other information of use to practitioners in the schools
- ❖ allow use of facilities
- ❖ provide adults who will serve as resources for students doing academic work in a particular field
- ❖ provide institutional research techniques

Cultural Institutions

- ❖ provide student and teacher training in the arts and other areas
- ❖ allow use of facilities
- ❖ sponsor performances
- ❖ provide materials
- ❖ aid collaborative development of an arts-related school in the community

Business Community

- ❖ forge business partnerships with individual schools
- ❖ provide advice and training services, including:

-data management,
-computer systems,
-human resource management,
-leadership,
-observing, coaching, and evaluating employees,
-maintenance management,
-public relations, and
-crisis management;

- ❖ provide mentors for students in school and in the workplace
- ❖ sponsor career and work awareness training for students
- ❖ provide internships and shadowing experiences for students
- ❖ offer tours of work places
- ❖ create speakers bureau
- ❖ aid collaborative development of a business-related school in the community

Health and Social Services Agencies

- ❖ create liaisons with schools and parent advocates
- ❖ distribute information on available services
- ❖ provide training in the schools, e.g., how to use services
- ❖ provide on-site services for students in pilot project schools, e.g., tutoring, substance and other abuse treatment, and prevention and support groups

To date, many Providence parents and community members as well as the R.I. Department of Education, Rhode Island businesses, social services agencies, and colleges and universities have provided useful resources to the Providence School Department. These are welcome and valuable but much more is needed.

Our research documented, repeatedly, the inadequate system for training and supporting staff. PROBE urges all members of the community to consider ways through which they could provide the expertise and training that the professionals in the system need. PROBE also urges the community to redouble its efforts in providing time and knowledge for Providence students. Mentoring and job shadowing; conducting tours of work places; working with a student interested, for example, in waste water treatment or architecture; loaning an auditorium; or teaching parenting classes all address important needs of the Providence school system.

Recommendation 32. Offer Social Services in Four to Six Schools

Recommendation: A pilot program must be developed in four to six Providence schools to make available representatives of essential health and social services agencies to students and their families in the school building.

The school principal and other staff members, in conjunction with the Public Education Fund, will work with the community agencies and parents to refine strategies for provision of services. Services will be available during some school hours as well as after school and some evening hours.

The social and health services agencies involved will:

- ❖ *provide information sessions and written materials about services to teachers, parents, and students,*
- ❖ *confer with teachers and other school personnel concerning student needs, and*
- ❖ *provide direct services to students and families.*

The school will:

- ❖ *publicize and encourage use of these services, and*
- ❖ *provide space and other support for confidential provision of services.*

Teachers and principals indicate a great need for social services for their students. Only 18% of the teachers surveyed agree that the social services needs of the students in their school are being met. They indicate enormous concern for better student and family access to needed social services. As one principal says, "The reality is that schools replace homes…that we are a social agency." Many teachers speak with great concern: "These kids have gone through things that I have never gone through in my life."

PROBE developed detailed maps showing the locations of social services agencies and all Providence public schools. The information from these maps has been used, along with information from the teacher survey, to identify schools with particularly strong social services needs. PROBE identified six schools that have few social services agencies nearby and whose teachers believe that their students have great need for support. The six schools (Sackett Street, Camden Avenue, Broad Street, Nathan Bishop, Roger Williams, and Central) would benefit most from a comprehensive approach providing social services through the schools.

Functioning models for this social-services mall approach to providing services in the schools exist in Newport (Rhode Island), Atlantic City (New Jersey), and Trenton (New Jersey).

Recommendation 33. Increase Business Community Involvement in Schools

Recommendation: The business community must respond to the urgent needs of the public schools if the community wishes to have educated employees, a livable city, and a healthy economy. This includes:

- ❖ *expanding support for collaborative programs with the schools such as PEF's School/Business Partnerships and the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce's School-to-Work Transition Program;*
- ❖ *donating pro bono expertise and advice in a wide variety of areas, e.g., data management, computer systems, human resources management (including process for the evaluation of personnel), leadership training, maintenance management, and public relations;*
- ❖ *providing additional learning opportunities for students, e.g., career and work awareness training, internships and shadowing experiences, work place tours, a business speakers bureau, and leadership in establishing a business-related school located in the business area of the city.*
- ❖ *advocating and lobbying, through the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce, for support for the Providence schools in the changes they are undertaking based on PROBE's recommendations, and insisting that these changes be facilitated in a timely fashion; and*

❖ *contributing funds to a pool (established by PEF) to help make possible some of the changes in the schools recommended in this report.*

Providence students, teachers, and principals alike have expressed the need for greater community involvement in the schools. High school students want learning experiences relevant to "real life" and the working world. They want their education to extend beyond the walls of the school. Teachers want to take their students outside those walls, and better prepare them for their adult life. Collaborative programs such as PEF's School/Business Partnerships provide a few such opportunities. A much greater variety of experiences, however, can be possible by linking with the schools a larger number and variety of businesses of all sizes.

One of the most effective programs according to PROBE's data is the School-to-Work Transition Program. The Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce, in conjunction with the School Department and with financial assistance from Workforce 2000, supports the School-to-Work Transition Program. Through this program, students at Hope, Mt. Pleasant, and Central High Schools first begin working with full-time mentors who keep careful track of grades and attendance. Students who achieve a C average, demonstrate exemplary school attendance, and prove they are ready for the working world are placed in paid positions at workplaces throughout the city. Efforts are made to match employment to the student's interests, and each student reports to a mentor in the work place.

Randomly selected students involved in the program who took part in a PROBE focus group are exceedingly positive about the program. They all agree that they went from failing or near failing grades to average or above-average grades. They say the school mentors are the key. "They check you all the time. There's someone on your tail. He's always on your case. He's a nice guy, but... you've got to be responsible."

Students say as well that the program changes their attitudes toward education and their understanding of the working world.

> *"You learn education is important. You can see where it can take you."*

> *"I'm learning how other people are taking care of their work. You see how they dress. We dress different in the street than we do at work."*

Students feel that the most important aspects of the program are the close, personal relationships that they have with their school and work mentors. And the most important lesson they learn—"I have to be responsible."

Business can be useful to schools in other ways, too. As stated in PROBE's Recommendation 36, the school system must increase its use of data for decision-making and goal-setting. In order to do this, the administration will need help in training personnel and designing an appropriate data management system. This is an excellent opportunity for businesses to provide help. An equally important opportunity lies in the area of public relations—helping the schools find more effective ways to share information with the community. Other areas include: human resources management, leadership training, personnel evaluation, and maintenance management.

The business community must not be just another group wishing that the schools did a better job of educating the work force of the future. They must provide people, ideas, facilities, and

funding to help shape the changing Providence schools. The benefits for the students are obvious. The companies who choose to be involved also receive benefits. PROBE conducted focus groups of employees from Providence businesses who are involved in a business partnership and in the School-to-Work Transition Program. One group of employees serves as mentors and tutors in an elementary school in Providence. The other group serves as work mentors for students in the School-to-Work Transition Program. They testify to the following benefits of collaborative programs for themselves personally and for their companies:

- ❖ a better understanding of the community in which they work;
- ❖ a heightened sense of teamwork among employees working to help young people;
- ❖ increased respect for upper management of their companies for being involved in such programs;
- ❖ greater pride in their companies (Several employees said that they are proud to talk about what their company is doing for the students and the schools.); and
- ❖ greater loyalty to their companies.

The business community has much to gain and much to give. It can make sure that school reform actually does take place. It is in a position to insist that the changes proposed by PROBE, for example, actually do occur in a timely fashion. Accomplishing this will require the full participation of many more business leaders. In a highly political climate such as that in Providence, business has considerable influence. We ask the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce to take the lead in this important effort.

Recommendation 34. Support Early Childhood Education

Recommendation: Providence, its city government, its school system, and the Rhode Island congressional delegation must support in every way possible programs that will prepare the whole child to meet the challenges of K–12 education.

All signs currently point to a coming emphasis on early childhood, preschool programs in the federal and state governments. These include special attention to health care as well as preparation for schooling. The children in the Providence schools enter with a widely diverse level of preparation. The first years of elementary schooling too often must be devoted to bringing learning skills to a standard from which the class can progress. The burdens of urban educational systems are eased by carefully crafted efforts by the federal and state governments to prepare students for school, e.g., the Head Start Program. The Providence Head Start Program is estimated, however, as serving currently only an estimated 30% of the city's eligible families.

PROBE urges the Rhode Island congressional delegation to push with vigor the funding of federal programs for preschool opportunities. In turn, it pleads with the Governor and General Assembly of Rhode Island to assist Providence with its special problems by full funding of any programs that strengthen the growth opportunities of preschool children.

Recommendation 35. Support Multicultural Arts Programs

Recommendation: In order to capitalize on the rich diversity of the racial/ethnic heritage within the Providence community, public schools must take the leadership in

celebrating that diversity through strong programs in the arts woven throughout the curriculum and the life of the schools. The creativity of teachers, students, and parents can be supplemented by relatively modest funding from private sources to make such an approach possible. Additionally, the General Assembly and the R.I. Department of Education must approve a change in law that will allow, after appropriate screening, artists from the community to donate their time and expertise to create in-school and after-school programs.

In tight economic times, most school systems have been forced to make unhappy choices and, as a result, have elected to cut arts programs from the curriculum. This has happened repeatedly in Providence to the point that the arts comprise but a small segment of what is available in the city's public schools. In Providence especially, the rich mixture of heritage among the schoolchildren should be an incentive to find a way around the economic pinch. The number of languages and dialects spoken in the homes of the city's students, for instance, is estimated to be at least 80. PROBE could not find another major city in the eastern half of the United States with the variety of racial/ethnic backgrounds of which Providence can boast.

More than this, the students themselves are quick to state their appreciation of diversity. Teachers hail it but also confess to the concern that they are not given the training to use it to potentially great educational advantage.

As a prototype, PROBE has explored the approach used in the Nashville, Tennessee, school district. In cooperation with the Nashville Institute for the Arts and th Leonard Bernstein Center, the Eakin Elementary School, for example, is embarking on its second year of an all-school program that draws upon the backgrounds of the 45% minority population within the student body. Every class and every teacher participate as do many of the parents.

Last year's theme was "Community," introduced through the schoolwide reading and discussion of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. To draw the various cultures together, the use of masks in each culture was explored with special emphasis on the African mask. All participants fashioned masks of their own, chose music and devised choreography to express their concepts of their own classroom community, and, at the end of the school year, participated in a major festival of the mask.

Eakin teachers and staff contributed their time and talents, parents attended programs and concerts staged by volunteer community groups, e.g., Uhuru Dance Group, and students began to learn about and appreciate the diversity within their own class and school. This year's theme is "Imagination," woven into the curriculum in all subjects and supplemented by artistic work, writing, and performance.

Through the arts, schools have an opportunity to help solve some of the more perplexing problems of society. Providence must view its racial/ethnic mix not as a smoldering problem but as an exciting opportunity.

Data Support and Information Sharing

Recommendation 36. Develop Integrated and Networked Data Collection and Dissemination System

Recommendation: The Providence School Department, with expertise loaned from local businesses and universities, must develop an integrated and networked data collection and dissemination system that supports decision-making and establishing systemwide goals.

Essential components of this recommendation include:

- ❖ *hiring an institutional researcher to improve the collection and analysis of data in the Providence school system (This should be done with assistance from colleges and universities in establishing an institutional research program for the Providence School Department.);*
- ❖ *using data processing and communications technology to enable all schools to share information with each other and with central administration;*
- ❖ *using data to set educational and organizational goals—in schools, in administrative departments, and for the system—and to measure progress toward these goals;*
- ❖ *developing and disseminating an annual report that describes the condition, performance, and progress of the Providence public schools; and*
- ❖ *disseminating data and interpretive information (other than that included in the annual report) to all who are involved or interested in the schools, including the Mayor, the City Council, and the media.*

Implementation of this recommendation depends on three conditions. First, the School Department must affirm its desire to collect and use data throughout the school system to analyze problems and implement improvements, to make policy decisions, and to inform all constituents of the Providence school system. Second, the School Board and City Council, as well as local businesses and community members, must provide funding for developing and implementing this information technology. Finally, school administrators and faculty members must receive professional training in compiling and using data in their school system.

The emphasis of PROBE's work during the last year has been to collect information. PROBE has collected data about nearly every aspect of the school system in Providence, including student test scores and dropout rates, teacher salaries and attendance, and budget allocations. Much of this information has been compiled directly from information supplied by the Superintendent and his staff.

As a result of this experience, PROBE offers five general observations.

Data collection is often disjointed. Data provided by the central administration come from several different offices, and other data are available only from a variety of other sources including school secretaries, parent newsletters, and reports from the R.I. Department of Education.

Obtaining useful data often is time-consuming or requires a wait of a few days to a few months while the data are retrieved. For example, teacher attendance is reported by the schools to central administration where it is compiled alphabetically by name; data on teacher attendance at each school, however, are not available except through tedious manual compilation.

The accuracy of the data, while generally good, is uncertain. In some cases, data are highly inaccurate; in other cases, inconsistencies are found, some of which cannot be explained satisfactorily.

Some critical information for evaluating school performance is not available. For example, the Providence School Department does not have information on the number of high school diplomas granted, the number of graduates who applied to college, or the number of students admitted to college.

Providence schools do not communicate easily with one another. For example, if a student transfers from one school to another within the district, the student's file must go through central administration, a time-consuming process that makes the student's records inaccessible to the teachers during the crucial first weeks after a transfer. The teachers have only the student's name.

Throughout PROBE's data collection process, data clearly accumulate in files throughout the school system, e.g., central administration offices, guidance offices, athletic departments, school offices. This scattered information is not used for analysis in an integrated or systematic manner. In fact, much of the data compiled on paper and manually filed away are apparently retrieved rarely for analysis. Thus, the usefulness of the data is limited. For example, while central administration knows the salaries of each Providence teacher, it does not know the mean or median teacher salary; other teacher profile information is also not readily available.

School Board members and central administrators readily acknowledge the lack of useful data for evaluation and decision-making. As one administrator observes, "Good ideas never seem to materialize because we are lacking the data. We are archaic. We are in the Dark Ages of technology and information gathering." Another administrator comments, "We don't know how to use information. There's no one qualified to gather it or to use it."

Developing educational programs must be based on valid information. Decisions unsupported by data are more likely to be influenced by special interests and less likely to benefit the students.

The Pittsburgh school district is an excellent example of using data as a powerful and objective tool in policy-making. After years of being divided on various educational issues, the Pittsburgh School Board set some specific priorities based on the analysis of a broad array of data. According to former Pittsburgh School Superintendent, Richard C. Wallace, "That exercise—in setting priorities based on the analysis of data—brought the board together. And for more than a decade, we had virtually a unanimous vote of the board on every educational issue that came before it."

Implementation

The five specific components of this recommendation address two overall directions. First, the Providence school system must decide what data should be collected, both at the school level and at the system level. These data should include information about the educational system, including school characteristics, learning processes, and student academic outcomes. Data collection should focus also on measuring whether the mission and goals of the schools and the system are met. The Superintendent, working with parents and other community members, recently developed a mission statement and goals, but it has not been determined how progress toward achieving these goals will be measured.

Second, the Providence school system must develop strategies for using data to improve the schools and for sharing information within and beyond the school system. The School Department can encourage community understanding and support for its schools by providing reliable data to the general public.

If the School Department seeks support on issues it takes to the School Board, the City Council, or community, it must be able to communicate pertinent facts; until these facts are shared, community opinions tend to be ruled by hearsay. High-quality data can help the community understand the challenges facing the Providence public schools, inform them of progress toward better education, and help them develop pride in the accomplishments of the school system. In addition, once the system has reliable and readily available data, it can use these data to procure more resources, such as private and federal grants.

The Providence School Department recently produced an annual report for 1991, the first in recent years. While improvements are recommended, this document is a valuable attempt to offer

the public a systematic profile of the school system, its programs, challenges, enterprises, and achievements.

As a continuing follow-up to the PROBE study, the PROBE Council of PEF will issue an annual report card of the Providence Blueprint for Education. (See *Statement on Follow-Up by the Public Education Fund* in chapter six.)

Recognition of Promising Programs and Review of Weak Areas

Recommendation 37. Support and Recognize Promising Programs

Recommendation: PROBE's mission was not to evaluate individual programs or schools. Throughout the course of our research, however, we heard many favorable comments and collected positive data about the following programs. Based on these comments and data, PROBE recommends that the benefits of these programs be expanded and replicated:

- ALP,
- at-risk teams in elementary schools and middle schools,
- Chapter 1 after-school program,
- CIRC,
- Equity 2000,
- Essential School at Hope High School,
- literacy curriculum and materials, and
- UCAP.

(The discussions that follow document PROBE's findings about each of these programs; these discussions are not intended as a definitive judgment. Our data simply will not sustain such a judgment, and the Providence School Department has not conducted sufficient evaluation to support such a judgment.)

Alternate Learning Project (ALP)

Throughout this report, we cite the success of the ALP. Our survey of high school students reveals that students at ALP are the most positive about their education. ALP students regard highly their relationships with teachers. Students feel they could go to teachers for help, feel they are treated with respect, feel that their teachers have high expectations for them. ALP students are positive about their learning. They feel that they study subjects that interest them, are involved in learning about subjects that are relevant to "real life," and go on field trips and hear outside speakers more often than students in other high schools. And they are positive about discipline, safety, and building cleanliness.

Besides these qualitative indicators of success, we also find many quantitative indicators. ALP students have a considerably higher attendance rate than students at Central, Hope and Mt. Pleasant. ALP teachers also have a higher attendance rate than the teachers at all other high schools. Over the last three years on overall MAT scores, only Classical students have scored in a higher percentile than ALP students. Despite serving a population of students who had been dissatisfied with their schooling, ALP's records show that almost one-half of the 1992 ALP graduates were admitted to a college or university.

In attitudes and outcomes, ALP students and teachers are highly satisfied. ALP offers students unique elective courses that are interesting to students, requires teachers to serve as advisors to stu-

dents, encourages students to take responsibility for their own education, and encourages teachers to take part in creating a curriculum. All of these features make ALP unique and effective.

At-Risk Teams in Elementary Schools and Middle Schools

At seven elementary schools and several middle schools, a team comprising a school guidance counselor, a clinical social worker, teachers, and the principal provide needed social services to students. The team meets with parents, makes home visits, and provides individual and family counseling and parent workshops. On their surveys, teachers whose schools had at-risk teams frequently praise the team's effort.

In the opinion of Providence's teachers, perhaps the system's largest area of need is increased social services for students. PROBE's teacher survey reveals that only 18% of teachers believe that the social services needs of their students are being met. Seventy-one percent of teachers believe that most of their students have exceedingly difficult family lives and only 10% of teachers believe that most of their students have strong family support. The at-risk teams appear to be helping to meet some of the severe social services needs of Providence students.

Chapter 1 After-School Program

Using funds from the federal government program for economically disadvantaged students, the School Department has started an after-school reading and writing program. In many elementary schools, Chapter 1 students have the opportunity to stay after school each afternoon and take part in enrichment and remedial reading and writing activities offered by teachers from their school. The program, according to teachers, parents, and administrators, is clearly an improvement over the "old" Chapter 1 program that pulled children out of their regular classes, thereby stigmatizing them. The "new" program provides much needed after-school activities as well as additional time for study in a safe environment.

Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC)

CIRC, a reading curriculum based on collaborative learning techniques, is frequently praised by the elementary school teachers who use it. Most teachers who comment on CIRC feel that it is not only extremely successful in developing reading skills but also helps students develop good interpersonal skills and allows weak and strong students to work together for mutual benefit. Because the program is a controlled example of cooperative learning, CIRC is also an effective first step in helping teachers experiment with heterogenous grouping and various forms of cooperative learning.

Equity 2000

Funded by a $1.25-million grant from the College Board, the Equity 2000 project appears to have significant promise. Because of Equity 2000, beginning in 1993, virtually all ninth grade students will be enrolled in an algebra class. The project's commitment to a high goal for all students and to the belief that *all* students can take on the serious academic challenge of algebra represents a confidence that must be replicated in the thinking of all Providence teachers, principals, professional staff, administrators, students, parents, and School Board members.

College Board research shows that success in algebra in ninth grade is the single most reliable indicator of whether a child will attend and be successful in college. The College Board chose

Providence and five other cities to pilot a program that will require virtually all ninth graders (most special education students are not included, but bilingual and LEP students are included) to take an algebra course. In preparation for this dramatic change, all of Providence's eighth and ninth grade math teachers, guidance counselors, and principals are receiving extensive training, including an 11-day summer conference. The first conference, held last summer, received high marks from virtually all participants. The School Department is also recruiting older students to work as tutors and is considering offering Saturday morning extra-help sessions.

The Essential School at Hope High School

Across the United States, Theodore Sizer's Essential Schools are recognized as one of the most successful school reform efforts. Based on nine simple principles, Essential Schools reinvent schools around active learning, student as worker, teacher as coach, and demonstrations of mastery.

One of the first Essential Schools began in Hope High School. Unfortunately, it has never been expanded from its isolation on the third floor of the school. Indeed, although hundreds of schools across the United States have joined the Coalition of Essential Schools, Hope High School remains one of the few where only one part of the school is guided by Essential School principles.

PROBE's research, although not conclusive or systematic in this regard, indicates that the Essential School is successful. Ninety percent of the 1992 Essential School graduates were admitted to a university, college, or community college. Attendance rates of students at the Essential School are between 8% and 10% higher than those of other Hope students, and SAT scores are also higher. Hope High School students express their satisfaction with how they learn, what they learn, and how they are treated by their teachers. Teachers express the belief that their teaching has been invigorated by the Essential School philosophy as well as by the opportunities for increased camaraderie and professional development provided by the special waiver for the Essential School in the Providence Teachers Union contract.

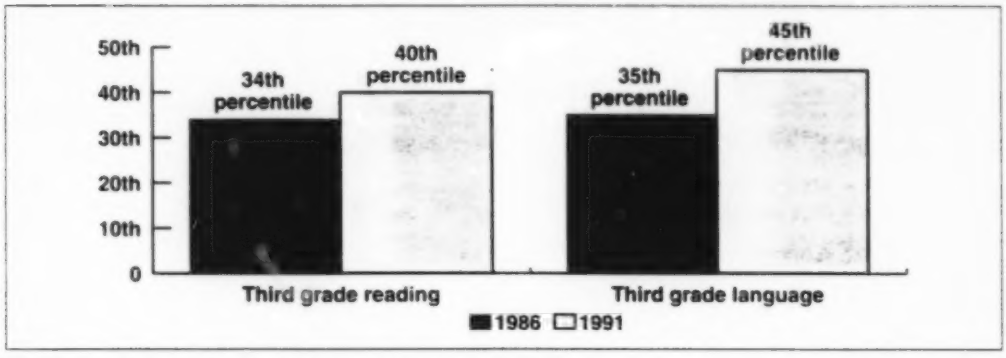
The Essential School—because of its philosophy, its small size, and the professional opportunities shared by its teachers—provides the kind of personal and rigorous education that is needed on all floors of all Providence schools.

Literacy Curriculum and Materials

Repeatedly, elementary school teachers praise the district's K–3 literacy curriculum and materials. One teacher speaks for many when she writes, "The literacy curriculum is excellent—as are all the materials provided. It is the *best program* I've seen in my 20 years of teaching." Many teachers praise the wide variety of materials and projects in the curriculum, projects that require creative thinking and writing and do not depend on basal readers. The development of the literacy curriculum involved many teachers and trial runs at different schools; this inclusive and extensive process yielded a curriculum that is praised by many teachers and has not received a single negative comment from any elementary school teacher.

Although the relationship between the literacy curriculum and test scores has not been established, the district reading and language percentiles on the MAT tests for third graders have improved over the last seven years (see Figure 5.10).

FIGURE 5.10
COMPARISON OF MAT READING AND LANGUAGE PERCENTILES



Urban Collaborative Accelerated Project (UCAP)

UCAP is an innovative school for potential dropouts in grades seven through 10. Students come from East Providence, Pawtucket, and Providence. UCAP students are given the opportunity to accelerate in grade, based on the acquisition of skills and knowledge necessary for each grade. Now in its fourth year, UCAP has recently received two very positive evaluations. Rhode Island College's Center for Evaluation and Research found that UCAP was "highly effective" in its stated goal to "intervene in the lives of potential dropouts and to help them succeed in more traditional high school programs." The Center's report showed that the attendance and grades of UCAP students improved and that their general attitude toward school also improved. In a 1992 study, the R.I. Department of Education agreed. In evaluating and ranking seven dropout programs across the state, R.I. Department of Education found that UCAP was the most effective.

Recommendation 38. Review and Improve Areas of Concern

Recommendation: PROBE's mission was not to evaluate individual programs or schools. Throughout the course of our research, however, outcome measures, survey data, and comments from teachers, parents, students, and administrators raised serious doubt about the quality of several programs. Consequently, PROBE recommends that each program be reviewed by a group of teachers, principals, administrators, parents/family members, students, and members of the community at large. After the review, the School Department will publicize each group's findings, its recommendations, and a plan and time line for implementing recommended changes. The School Board must examine and approve these plans, develop appropriate policies, and take the necessary steps to ensure that changes are made, outcomes are measured, and improvement is documented.

The programs needing review are:

- *special education program;*
- *ESL;*
- *student enrollment in Classical High School, AP courses, and the Gifted and Talented Program;*
- *use of computer technology by students and teachers;*

❖ *use of libraries and media centers; and*

❖ *process for review of curricula and textbooks.*

(The discussions that follow document PROBE's findings about each of these programs; these discussions are not intended as a definitive judgment. Our data will not sustain such a judgment, and the Providence School Department has not conducted sufficient evaluation to support such a judgment.)

Special Education Program

The recent history of the Providence School Department's special education program is deeply disturbing. Over the last decade, the School Department has repeatedly failed to provide to special education students the services that federal and state laws require.

In the fall of 1990, the R.I. Department of Education considered the situation so dire that it decided to withhold all federal and state special education monies until "continued deficiencies" in the special education program were addressed. A few weeks later this decision was rescinded, but in January 1991, then-Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education J. Troy Earhart found "growing areas of noncompliance," which were considered a "serious problem" because several of the cited areas involved direct services to students.

Ten months later, in November 1991, the U.S. Department of Education visited Providence schools to examine the special education program. While they noted several improvements, they found that Providence was not in compliance with federal and state laws because the system:

- ❖ made student placement decisions before individual educational programs (IEPS) were completed;
- ❖ made final placement decisions according to space availability, not according to student needs;
- ❖ did not place students in programs closest to their homes but rather in buildings "based on factors such as administrative convenience, availability of space, building accessibility, and teacher contracts";
- ❖ placed students with severe or profound disabilities in separate buildings, that is, not in the "least restrictive setting" that the law requires; and
- ❖ failed to schedule regular interactions with nondisabled students because of scheduling complications, space restrictions, and Providence Teachers Union contract provisions.

In an effort to respond to this report, Providence developed an extensive plan that required more than an additional $2.1 million to be spent annually on special education. This spending was included in the 1992–93 budget, and implementation of the plan began in the spring of 1992. PROBE was not able to assess the impact of the plan in its first year of implementation.

It should be noted, however, that in the spring of 1992, many concerns were voiced to PROBE: in a focus group of randomly selected special education teachers, in an interview with a parent from the Providence Advisory Committee/Special Education (PACSE), and in interviews and surveys of parents with children in the special education program. Teachers are troubled by their lack of communication with colleagues, lack of evaluation and professional development, the length of time it takes to place students, and the frequency that records are missing. Parents are dissatisfied with lack of communication with central administration, the length of time it takes to place students in appropriate programs, and the unwillingness of the system to place special education children in classes and activities with other children in school.

A review of the progress-to-date is needed as are recommendations to ensure that appropriate corrections are carried out. Progress has been made, but continued effort and vigilance are necessary.

English as a Second Language (ESL)

PROBE conducted a focus group of randomly selected bilingual and ESL teachers and analyzed surveys from bilingual and ESL teachers, students, and parents. PROBE also reviewed results of the ESL students who took tests in an effort to exit the ESL program and be placed in mainstream classes. All this information generated concern and a belief that the program needs review and improvement in the following areas:

- ❖ communication between bilingual and ESL teachers;
- ❖ communication between mainstream teachers, and bilingual and ESL teachers;
- ❖ the speed at which bilingual and ESL students are "mainstreamed"; and
- ❖ the general quality of both programs.

Bilingual and ESL teachers feel they need increased opportunities to meet and discuss their work and classroom experiences. These teachers also feel that they should have opportunities to meet with other classroom teachers so that both groups can discuss the needs of bilingual and ESL students. Teachers report that the system is not able to conduct timely and accurate assessments of students' needs and often confuses learning problems with language problems. A specialist in the R.I. Department of Education points out that Providence uses 20 different tests to assess students whose first language is not English. No other district in the state uses more than six.

Parents express contradictory concerns about mainstreaming their children: Some feel that it takes too long and some feel that it is done too quickly. Non–ESL teachers frequently say they feel bilingual and ESL students are mainstreamed too quickly.

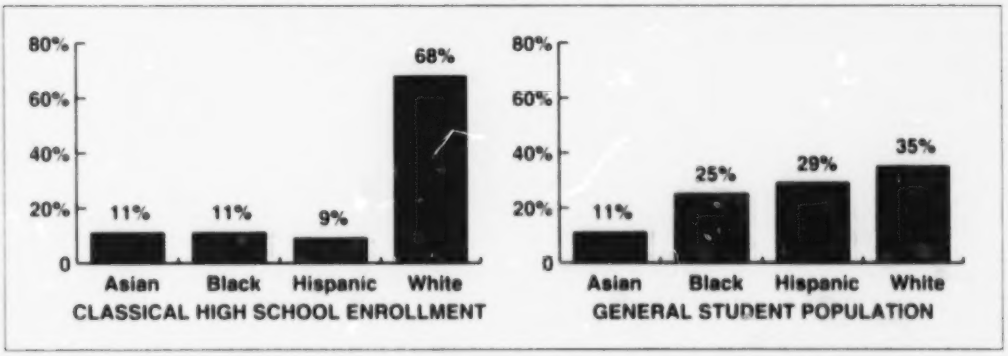
Test data for ESL students are difficult to interpret but troubling. R.I. Department of Education guidelines require that a student must score above the 36th percentile on a standardized test before leaving the program. The R.I. Department of Education allows districts to choose from among several tests to assess ESL students, and Providence uses the MAT. Yet, in its 1990–91 data, the R.I. Department of Education reports that of the 7,550 Providence students who took the English language test, no student scored above the 36th percentile. To R.I. Department of Education officials, this is cause for concern; to several of the Providence teachers with whom we spoke, the test is so difficult that they would not expect their "regular" students to pass it, let alone bilingual or ESL students.

During the past five years, the system's ESL and bilingual population has grown dramatically; it now represents more than 20% of the entire student population and continues to grow. Given the demographics of the city, the bilingual and ESL programs must be of the highest quality. Both programs need careful review and substantive revision.

Student Enrollment in Classical High School, AP Courses, and the Gifted and Talented Program

PROBE's data concerning the racial/ethnic diversity of students enrolled in Classical High School, AP courses, and the Gifted and Talented Program are of deep concern. All three sets of data document severe underrepresentation of black and Hispanic students. Classical High School's population is clearly unrepresentative of the overall student population (see Figure 5.11).

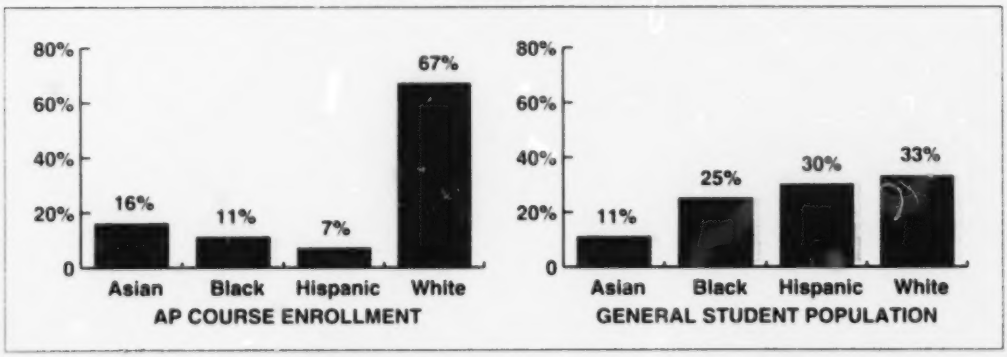
FIGURE 5.11
RACIAL/ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF STUDENTS ENROLLED AT CLASSICAL HIGH SCHOOL



Classical students voice concerns about the lack of diversity in the student and teacher population as well as the need for a multicultural curriculum. Contrary to what we heard at the other high schools, Classical students also express concern about racial divisiveness within the school and social cliques formed along racial/ethnic lines. Several black and Hispanic students say that when people find out they attend Classical, they are often treated with disdain for attending what is perceived to be an all-white high school. To date, not a single black, Hispanic, or Asian teaches at Classical.

PROBE's data concerning the racial/ethnic diversity of students enrolled in AP courses are also disturbing, for they, too, show significant underrepresentation of black and Hispanic students (see Figure 5.12).

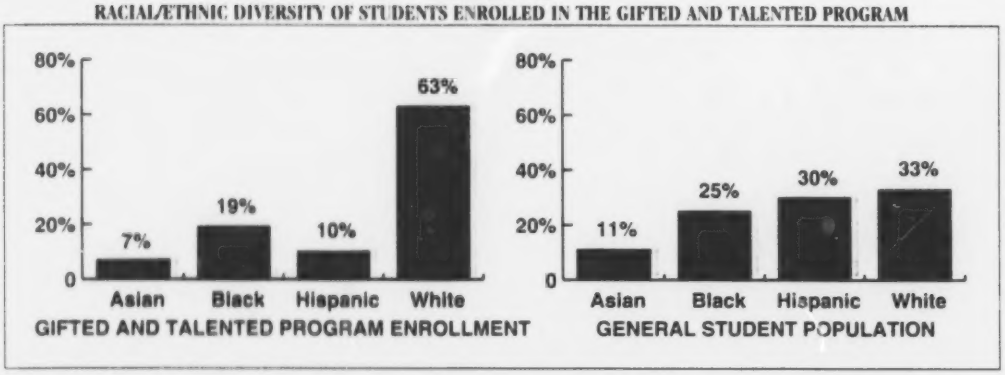
FIGURE 5.12
RACIAL/ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN AP COURSES



Of additional concern, virtually all of the system's AP courses are offered at Classical High School. (One AP history course is offered at Hope Essential School.) Thus, a Mt. Pleasant High School student who excels in French or a Hope High School student with great ability in calculus cannot take a rigorous AP course. This obvious inequity helps to explain the sense of being less valued and less respected that students at Central, Hope, and Mt. Pleasant High Schools voice continually in focus groups and in surveys.

Of equal concern are the data concerning the racial/ethnic diversity of students enrolled in the Gifted and Talented Program. These data also show significant underrepresentation of Asian, black, and especially Hispanic children (see Figure 5.13).

FIGURE 5.13
RACIAL/ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN THE GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAM



While the School Department has recently made some progress in increasing minority representation at Classical High School and in the Gifted and Talented Program, continued progress must be made. Review and change in the selection processes, as well as in the provision of ongoing educational support, are much needed if the system is going to provide equal opportunity to all children as well as lessons from diversity.

Use of Computer Technology by Students and Teachers

Teachers at all levels comment on the usefulness of computers in class and in special projects. But more than one-third of all teachers (37%) report inadequate access to a properly installed computer. PROBE's school visits revealed a disturbing number of unused computers and obsolete equipment. Reflecting on this situation, one elementary school teacher who substitutes in many buildings wrote, "Many of the schools I go to have computers in the room, but either they are not plugged in, there is no printer, or teachers are afraid of them. Dust covers most of them."

Workers in the 21st century must be able to capitalize on the power of computers. With the help of the business community, the Providence School Department must assess its capabilities and needs and then develop a comprehensive plan for instruction and an aggressive plan for increasing the technology available to students and teachers. The newly opened Veazie Street Elementary School offers an excellent example of what can be provided to students.

Use of Libraries and Media Centers

The recent $1.2-million Library Power grant from the DeWitt Wallace–Reader's Digest Fund provides an excellent opportunity to improve libraries in the elementary schools and middle schools. The Library Power Project grant provides extensive training for librarians so they can implement flexible scheduling and make libraries the hub of a school and not a room where students are required to go once a week. The grant also provides significant matching funds for buying books and furniture to refurbish libraries.

Nevertheless, the School Department must ensure that when the Library Power Project is completed in 1994, a comprehensive plan for the use of the libraries and media centers will be in place. Currently, many teachers are dissatisfied with the use of the libraries; 22% of all teachers report that their classroom effectiveness is limited because of poor school library facilities. A number of teachers commented about limited access to the library. An elementary school teacher wrote, "Our

library is fine, but children have very limited access." A middle school teacher wrote, "We have a beautiful library, but I feel it is not being properly utilized." Another teacher complained "Our library is not used by students. They're not motivated to use it."

To date, there are no funds in the School Department budget *specifically* allocated for school libraries and media centers, nor is there a comprehensive plan to develop the library and media centers. These needs must be addressed before the DeWitt Wallace–Reader's Digest Fund grant ends.

Process for Review of Curricula and Textbooks

Providence replaces textbooks every 10 years. While this may be adequate in some fields, it is inadequate in several areas where dramatic changes are occurring, e.g. computers, science, and geography. Some teachers complain that their input in the process of selecting new textbooks is first solicited and then ignored by the School Department. A review of the process by which books and materials are selected and purchased is needed, with special attention to the different needs of different academic areas. Additionally, teacher survey comments indicate a need to review:

- ❖ math curricula, textbooks, and materials for elementary school and middle school grades (especially the Riverside Math series); and
- ❖ science and social studies curricula, textbooks, and materials for elementary school and middle school grades.

IF THERE IS INSUFFICIENT PROGRESS...

Recommendation 39. Explore Alternatives for Radical, Permanent Change

Recommendation: At the outset of this report, we stated that the only interest group of concern to the Providence Public Schools are the students themselves. They are the reason for being. Reform makes no sense merely for the sake of change, only for the sake of the students.

Every effort must be expended by those responsible for the schools to transform the schools according to the outlines of this report. If significant progress has not been made within a relatively short span of time, then—again for the sake of students—the school system must undergo radical, permanent change.

If that be the case, several alternatives are at hand. As an example, PROBE has watched with interest the initial steps across the nation in a variety of forms grouped under the general topic of CHOICE. The public schools must be prepared to move in the direction of alternatives including CHOICE by 1997 if progress toward improving educational quality is not obvious by early 1997.

Several styles of school delivery under the heading of CHOICE are now the subject of experimentation in various school systems across the nation. (We speak of CHOICE in this context as involving enrollment with government subsidy by a student in a school other than those in his/her own system.) Nearby Massachusetts, for example, allows students to take a portion of their government subsidy and enroll in another district in the state if that district has schools and space better-suited to their needs.

Other states have programs allowing students to convert their public subsidies into tuition at private schools. The widely publicized Edison Project (Whittle Plan) is still in the formative stage but is being watched carefully. In all of these instances the rationale is that if the schools in that district

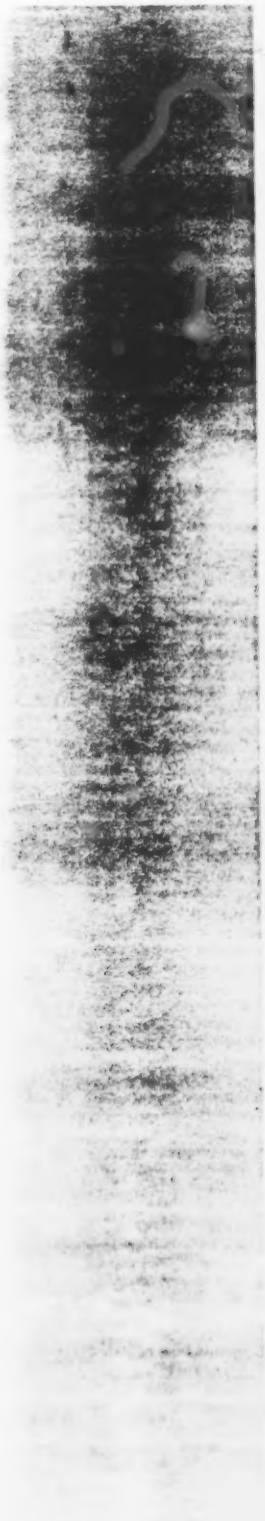
are not of sufficient quality, then students should be free to take all or a portion of what it costs to educate them to a school with promise of higher quality, which may be privately operated or lying within another public district.

PROBE urges PEF and other concerned civic groups to keep abreast of what is happening in various CHOICE experiments elsewhere and to watch particularly for informed evaluation. In this way, if the need arises, the Providence system will be better prepared to move. Indeed, experimentation with alternative forms may be desirable in the interim in order to gain experience. The explosion of the youth population in Providence now and for the coming years will require that new schools be built. The use of some form of CHOICE could result in possible and substantial savings for Providence.

For the next few years, PROBE believes that enough serious concern exists over the quality of the Providence schools to provide the momentum for the transformation of its schools. All parties—the Mayor, the City Council, the School Board, the Board of Regents and Commissioner, the Superintendent and his staff, the Providence Teachers Union, the teachers, *and* the students—seem resolved to make changes. We believe they should be given the opportunity. During this time, alternatives will become more refined and available. After four years, if substantial progress has not been realized, then private and public alternatives in and outside of Providence must be encouraged for the sake of the students.

Who Will Do It and When

Chapter Six



The voices have been heard, data collected, comparisons made, and recommendations brought forward. PROBE's report asks everyone to pitch in. It requires better ways of communication and new roles for professionals, community members, students, and parents. It calls for vigorous leadership, high expectations, and enthusiastic participation. No one person can do it all. Whether the schools change depends on all of us.

This final chapter includes a time line showing when work must begin and when changes must be evident. It also identifies those who are charged with initiating action on each recommendation and who else must be on the team.

The responsibility is heavy; the promise is great. Imagine…

FIGURE 6.1
TIME LINE
IMPLEMENTATION OF PROBE RECOMMENDATIONS

STARTING DATE	RESPONSIBLE FOR INITIATION	THOSE INVOLVED
To Begin Immediately		
1. Imagine... Recognize and Resolve.	Mayor, All	All
2. Create smaller learning environments. (Immediate planning. All large schools restructured by 9/97.)	Superintendent, School Board	SUP, PEF, PR, T, SB, TU, ST
8. Conduct national search for Superintendent.	School Board	SB, SUP
9. Conduct national search for administrators.	Superintendent, School Board	SUP, SB
11. Establish and enforce a strict code of ethics. (Immediate planning. Adopted by 12/93.)	Superintendent, School Board	All
12. Redesign the budget process. (Operational by 9/94.)	Superintendent, School Board	SUP, BUS, SB, TU
14. Revise accountability of custodial services. (Immediate planning. Operational by 9/93.)	Mayor, School Board	M, SB, SUP, Unions
22. Institute professional development and evaluation of School Board.	School Board	SB, PEF, M, SUP
23. Institute professional development and evaluation of central administration.	Superintendent	SUP, BUS, HE, SSA
24. Institute professional development and evaluation of principals.	Superintendent	SUP, SB, PR, BUS, HE
28. Implement 60/40 funding for Providence and guaranteed student entitlement.	Board of Regents, CE	BR, CE, G, GA
31. Encourage community to donate expertise and facilities.	PEF, BUS, P, SSA, CE, HE, CI	All
33. Increase business community involvement in schools.	Business Community	BUS, PR, SUP, T, ST, PEF
34. Support early childhood education.	All	G, GA, M, SUP, BUS, SSA
37. Support and recognize promising programs.	Superintendent	SUP, SB
38. Review and improve areas of concern. (Immediate planning. Review under way by 9/93.)	Superintendent	SUP, SB, T, PR, P, ST, PEF
Spring 1993		
15. Organize regular discussion sessions for teachers.	Superintendent	SUP, T, PR, TU
16. Organize student committees.	Principals	PR, T, ST, P
17. Establish informal student town meetings.	Principals	PR, T, ST, GC
18. Establish informal parent town meetings.	Principals	PR, P, T, GC, TU
19. Redesign monthly principal meetings.	Superintendent	SUP, PR

STARTING DATE	RESPONSIBLE FOR INITIATION	THOSE INVOLVED
30. Allocate funds to address immediate priority needs.	Superintendent, School Board	SUP, SB, CC
36. Develop integrated and networked data collection and dissemination system.	Superintendent, School Board	SUP, SB, CC, PR, BUS, HE
Summer 1993		
13. Allow principals to choose their staffs.	Superintendent	PR, SUP, AU, TU, Unions
Fall 1993		
3. Lengthen student working day.	Superintendent, School Board	SUP, SB, TU, T, ST, P, AV
4. Lengthen teacher working day.	Superintendent, School Board	SUP, SB, TU, T, P, AV
5. Expect teachers to meet with parents.	Superintendent, School Board	SUP, SB, TU, T, P, AV
6. Lengthen teacher working year.	Superintendent, School Board	SUP, SB, TU, T, AV
7. Redesign process for School Board appointments.	Mayor	M, SB, P, SSA, HE, BUS, PEF
10. Institute school-based hiring for teachers. (Design begins. In operation 3/94.)	Superintendent, School Board	SUP, SB, PR, T, TU, AU
21. Establish site management at five prototype schools. (Planning begins. In operation 9/94.)	Superintendent, School Board	SUP, SB, PR, T, TU, PEF, P, BUS
25. Institute professional development of teachers: mentoring, peer coaching, intervention, recognition of excellence.	Superintendent, Teachers Union	SUP, TU, T, PR, BUS, HE, PEF
26. Institute school-based professional development designed by teachers.	Superintendent, School Board	SUP, SB, CC, PR, T, CE, HE
27. Institute new system for teacher and staff eval--uation and termination for unsatisfactory perfor-mance.(Identification begins. Evaluation 5/94.)	Superintendent	SUP, PR, TU, AU, SB, T
29. Hire full-time grant writer.	Superintendent	SUP, SB
32. Offer social services in four to six schools.	PEF, Superintendent	PEF, SUP, SB, PR, SSA
35. Support multicultural arts program.	Mayor, PEF, Superintendent	PEF, SUP, GA, CE, SB, CC, T
20. Establish goals by and within each school.	Superintendent, Principals	PR, T, P, BUS SSA, ST
Spring 1997		
39. Explore alternatives for radical, permanent change.	PEF	PEF, All

A – All
AU – Administrators Union
BR – Board of Regents
BUS – Business
CA – Central Administration
CC – City Council
CE – Commissioner of Education
CI – Cultural Institutions
G – Governor of Rhode Island
GA – General Assembly of Rhode Island
GC – Guidance Counselors
HE – Higher Education
M – Mayor
P – Parents
PEF – Public Education Fund
PR – Principals
RIDE – R.I. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
SB – School Board
SSA – Social Services Agencies
ST – Students
SUP – Superintendent
T – Teachers
TU – Teachers Union

ESTIMATED COST OF PROBE'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The PROBE Commission made a commitment at the beginning of its work to develop recommendations that Providence could afford. It is all too easy to dream expensive dreams about what schools could do if they had unlimited budgets. We chose instead to tackle the possible. Fully 85% of our recommendations require either no or limited additional funding; many recommendations do require changes in attitudes, focus, and behavior.

We believe that additional funding for professional development, for example, should come from reallocations and that the longer school day and school year should be accepted by all parties as a necessary move in the best interests of Providence students. The hiring of a full-time grant writer should be achieved through the partial support of a local corporation and a reallocation of a central administration position. Indeed, much can be achieved without additional funding if all involved take part in aggressive and creative approaches.

By our estimation, five of our recommendations will require significant increases. Below, we discuss the costs of these recommendations; our figures are rough and meant as a point of departure. Any number of variables could change radically these estimates.

Recommendation 2: Create Smaller Learning Environments

Each school will need a small grant ($10,000 to $15,000) for a planning team. Subsequent professional training and team building could be built into efforts to increase professional development activities. In Philadelphia, teachers who are part of smaller schools are paid a stipend for participating in two week-long summer training and planning sessions. If Providence followed this example, additional cost would be approximately $500,000 per year.

Recommendation 21: Institute Site Management at Five Prototype Schools

During the first year of the implementation of this recommendation, each school will need a small grant for planning ($10,000 to $15,000). Beginning with the second year, each school will receive annually additional funds for school-specific professional training, particularly in shared decision making and team building ($20,000 to $50,000).

Recommendation 25: Institute Mentoring and Intervention Program for Teachers

Using the models from Cincinnati and Toledo, the cost for these programs would be approximately $400,000 a year.

Recommendation 32: Offer Social Services in Four to Six Schools

Estimating the costs of this recommendation is difficult since each school will design and implement a different model. We believe, however, that the cost should not be prohibitive. Keeping the

schools open longer hours could be negotiated through the schools, the unions, and social service agencies. The agencies should be able to bear much of the expense of their staff, especially since overhead would be provided by the schools.

Recommendation 36: Develop an Integrated and Networked Data Collection and Dissemination System

Ultimately, this will prove to be a costly improvement. The initial expense of hardware, software, hook-ups to all schools, and training for central administrators and school personnel will easily exceed $2,000,000. Obviously, not all changes would come at once, but large steps must be taken as soon as possible. Maintaining the system and qualified operators would also be an additional but essential expense in the annual operating budget.

STATEMENT OF FOLLOW-UP BY THE PUBLIC EDUCATION FUND

The Public Education Fund (PEF) was founded in 1986 as an independent, nonprofit organization comprised of business leaders, educators, and citizens concerned about the future of Providence public schools. PEF's early efforts focused on convening groups to improve education. Its primary mission is "to stimulate cooperative change in education so that Providence Public Schools become preeminent in urban education."

PEF's Board of Directors is committed to leadership in implementing PROBE recommendations. The **PRO**vidence **B**lueprint for **E**ducation has been designed as the school system's blueprint for change; it will also provide the basis for PEF's future planning. To that end, PEF is reviewing and modifying its existing programs in light of PROBE findings and their implications for change.

Dr. Edward D. Eddy, President Emeritus of the University of Rhode Island and Chair of the PROBE Commission, has become a member of PEF's Board and will chair a new Council of the PEF Board that will spearhead the implementation of PROBE recommendations. This council includes a variety of former PROBE Commission members and PEF Board members. It will have a director and necessary staff to help plan and push for results.

The PROBE Council has accepted the challenge to act as facilitator and catalyst to ensure that all parties from the Mayor, City Council, the School Board, the School Department, the Teachers Union, business leaders, and others move toward change.

Under Dr. Eddy's leadership, the PROBE Council will lead the charge, taking responsibility for both the fund-raising and assisting with implementing several recommendations. Examples might include creating smaller more personal units within the larger schools, helping to coordinate staff development efforts at all levels, involving business and higher education in setting the parameters of a systemwide data base for the School Department, continuing data collection and dissemination activities, initiating new ways to bring parents into the schools, reexamining the role of the Partners in Education Program with regard to articulated school needs, looking into pilot projects in school-based management, and bringing community agencies into the schools.

The role of the PROBE Council, as PEF envisions it, is to require accountability so that reform efforts will become a reality. To that end, PEF will develop and issue an annual report card documenting progress toward the implementation of all PROBE recommendations.

PEF is exceedingly proud of the achievements of the PROBE Commission. PROBE has established a unique process including surveys based on focus group results, conducting extensive interviews, and listening carefully to constituents. PROBE has created an atmosphere of trust where constituency groups feel they will be heard and made a tremendous contribution to our understanding of the complex issues facing the Providence Public School System. We look forward to the challenges facing the new PROBE Council in helping to make Providence a top urban school system.

John L. Conroy
President
Public Education Fund

A Brief Profile of Providence Public Schools

Appendix A

Student Population

❖ In the 1992–93 school year, approximately 22,500 students were enrolled in Providence public schools.

❖ Over the last 10 years, the number of Providence students has increased 20%. In 1983, approximately 18,000 students were in the system compared to 22,500 currently. Over the last five years, student enrollment has increased by approximately 500 students per year.

❖ The elementary population is growing much faster than the middle school or high school population. The number of elementary school and middle school students increased 39% and 11%, respectively, during the 1980s, while high school student population decreased 3%. The ungraded/unclassified population grew 20%.

❖ In 1992, 33% of students were white, 30% Hispanic, 25% black, and 12% Asian. This represents a dramatic change from the population in 1983, when 54% of students were white, 25% black, 12% Hispanic, and 8% Asian.

❖ The fastest growing population is Hispanic, which has more than tripled in 10 years and in each of the last five years has increased by more than 500 students. Currently, the number of black and Asian students is relatively stable, while the number of white students has decreased by more than 350 students in each of the last five years.

❖ Fifty-two percent of all Providence students receive free or reduced-price lunches because their family income is limited. This percentage has remained relatively stable over the last decade.

❖ Twenty-three percent of all students are Limited English Proficient (LEP). Of these students, 60% are Spanish-speaking. The LEP population has increased steadily over the last decade.

❖ Eleven percent of all students receive special education or related services. This population has grown proportionately with the increase of the student population in the 1980s.

Buildings

❖ Providence has 38 school buildings (24 elementary schools, 6 middle schools, 5 high schools, 3 vocational/occupational schools) and one administration building.

❖ The average building is approximately 60 years old. Nine buildings are less than 30 years old; 20 buildings are more than 60 years old.

❖ The system is currently at capacity. In the last three years, three new buildings and 12 modular classrooms have been opened to accommodate the steady growth.

❖ Class size is generally limited, by contract with the Providence Teachers Union, to 26 students.

Budget

❖ The 1990–91 budget totaled approximately $125,000,000, or $6,000 per pupil.

❖ Forty-nine percent of revenue came from the State of Rhode Island, 43% from the City of Providence, and 8% from the federal government.

❖ Expenses were classified as instructional (70%), building and maintenance (10%), administration (9%), student services (4%), transportation (3%), and debt service (3%).

Special Programs

❖ Magnet programs, which offer enriched curriculum in desegregated schools, are offered in four elementary schools and three high schools.

❖ The Alternate Learning Project (ALP) offers a nontraditional education to 150 high school students.

❖ Classical High School offers a more demanding college prep curriculum to approximately 800 students.

❖ Hope Essential School, housed in Hope High School, is part of the National Coalition of Essential Schools and offers a more challenging curriculum emphasizing writing, speaking, and thinking.

❖ The Gifted and Talented Program enrolls approximately 500 students in grades K–8 and provides enriched, individualized learning opportunities.

❖ Ten Advanced Placement (AP) courses are offered; nine of these courses are offered at Classical High School and one is offered at Hope High School.

❖ The Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP) is an accelerated alternative school for potential dropouts in grades seven through 10. UCAP enrolls 75 students from Providence, plus students from East Providence and Pawtucket.

❖ The School-to-Work Transition Program works with 100 high school students, providing each with an advisor and, ultimately, a part-time job, and an on-the-job mentor.

Student Outcomes

❖ Since 1986, the mean percentile on the MAT total basic battery has risen steadily in the elementary grades. In 1992, the mean percentile scores in grades one through five were in the mid-40s.

❖ Since 1986, the mean percentile on the MAT total basic battery score has stayed approximately the same for eighth grade students. The percentile has been in the mid- to high 30s (compared to percentiles in the 40s for elementary school students), thereby indicating that Providence students lose ground as they progress from elementary schools through middle schools.

❖ Since 1986, the mean percentile on the MAT total basic battery score has dropped in the 10th grade. The percentile has been in the mid-40s.

❖ In 1991, the average total SAT score for a senior was 788, with a verbal score of 371 and a math score of 417.

❖ The average SAT score has declined 54 points over the last four years, from 832 in 1988 to 788 in 1991. The percentage of seniors taking the test has increased from 49% in 1986 to 56% in 1991. Dramatic changes in the racial/ethnic composition of the student body have occurred.

❖ During the 1990–91 school year, the average systemwide student attendance rate was 88.4%. Average attendance at elementary schools was 93%; at middle schools, 87%; and at high schools, 83%. Attendance at the three comprehensive high schools (Central, Hope, Mt. Pleasant High Schools) was below 80%.

❖ Attendance in the elementary schools has improved steadily over the last five years and declined slightly in the high schools.

❖ Over the last seven years, the dropout rate has declined steadily. Because the method of calculating the dropout rate has changed during this period, precise figures are unavailable; a fair estimate is that the dropout rate has decreased from 40% to 32%.

❖ During the 1990–91 school year, 1,727 students received 2,778 out-of-school suspensions. The number of students suspended has increased dramatically over the last five years, particularly in the elementary schools and middle schools.

❖ In 1991, 901 students received a high school diploma. This total is 9% more than the 825 diplomas granted in 1987.

❖ According to figures provided by high school guidance counselors, 64% of Providence's 1992 high school graduates were admitted to a two- or four-year college.

❖ Figures on college intentions vary significantly by high school. Ninety-three percent of Classical graduates planned to go on to college, 73% of Hope graduates, 61% of Central graduates, 46% of ALP graduates, and 30% of Mt. Pleasant graduates.

Personnel

❖ Providence's School Board consists of nine members appointed by the Mayor. They are paid $3,500 annually and receive full family health benefits.

❖ The central administration includes 27 certified professionals. Thirteen noncertified professionals manage the business functions of the system, e.g., budget, food service, and transportation.

❖ In 1991–92, Providence had 31 principals and 23 assistant principals. Of the principals, 58% were male and 42% female; 27 were white, 3 black, and 1 Hispanic. The average salary was $57,400.

❖ In 1991–92, of the 1,398 full-time certified teachers, 72% were female; 88% were white, 8% black, 3% Hispanic, and 1% Asian.

❖ The average number of years of experience for a teacher was 12.9 years. Twenty percent of the teachers have more than 20 years experience, 48% have 10 to 19 years experience, and 32% have 0 to 9 years experience.

❖ In 1991–92, the average teacher's salary was $41,893. (This figure includes basic salary as well as additional compensation a teacher may receive for extracurricular activities, seniority bonuses, and additional degrees or course work. It does not include payment for summer work or payment if class enrollment exceeds the contractual maximum.) Teachers receive full family health benefits, which include chiropractic, dental, prescription, and vision care.

❖ Teachers are permitted 20 sick days per year. The average teacher was absent 10.5 days in 1991–92; 38% of teachers were absent fewer than 5 days, while 11% were absent more than 20 days.

❖ In 1991–92, teachers filed 234 grievances. Forty percent concerned facility and security problems, 29% concerned compensation and class overages, and 18% related to contested appointments to positions.

Report Card to the Community

Appendix B

On the following pages PROBE outlines a sample school/community report that can be used to measure, monitor, and communicate a school's progress toward providing a quality education for its students and community. Each school in the Providence School Department is encouraged to develop its own school/community report, perhaps by tailoring this sample for its specific educational environment and focus. All school/community reports should include important student outcome indicators, such as attendance, test scores, and student promotion/retention and graduation/dropout rates.

This sample report illustrates the types of data that can be combined to give a comprehensive picture of a school. Some data are presented in order to show trends over time. Other data are snapshots of an important component of the student learning process.

This example should not be taken "as is." It includes data points that may be applicable to high schools, but not to elementary schools, and vice versa.

Accurate and appropriate collection of data is essential. The data points on this sample report require various collection methods, including surveys, check points, and comprehensive and articulated record keeping.

While the report itself is valuable, of even greater value may be the participation, dialogue, discussion, and involvement of various interested people. The task of creating an individualized school/community report helps the school understand and appreciate the need for collecting and using data in every facet of its operation.

SCHOOL/COMMUNITY REPORT

Background

School Name _____ Grade Levels _____

Address _____

Principal _____

Assistant Principal _____

_____

Student Population

Background	Current Providence elementary pop.	Current (this school) as of [date]	5 Years ago Providence elementary pop.	5 Years (this school) as of [date]
Native American	xx%	xx%	xx%	xx%
Asian	xx%	xx%	xx%	xx%
Black	xx%	xx%	xx%	xx%
Hispanic	xx%	xx%	xx%	xx%
White	xx%	xx%	xx%	xx%
Other	xx%	xx%	xx%	xx%
TOTAL	xx%	xx%	xx%	xx%

LEP Students: #_____ (____% Asian ____% Hispanic ____% Other)

Special Ed Students: #_____ (____% of all students in school)

____% Native American ____% Asian

____% Hispanic ____% Black ____% LD ____% MR

____% White ____% Other ____% BD ____% Other

Students receiving free or reduced-price lunch: ____

(____% of all students in school)

Gifted and talented students: _____ (____% of all students in school)

Students who transferred out during last year:

To public schools within PSD: _____

To public schools outside PSD: _____

To private schools _____

_____

Teacher and School Staff

Total full-time teachers: _____ Itinerants:

____% Native American ____% Black _____

____% Asian ____% White _____

____% Hispanic ____% Other _____

Teachers with master's degrees: #_____ (____%)

Years experience: _____(average)

____% 1–5 ____% 6–10 ____% 11–19 ____%20+

Number of teachers who transferred out during previous year:_____

Number of new teachers during previous year:_____

Total school support staff: _____

____ Secretaries ____ Nurses ____ Librarians ____ Other

____ Custodians ____ Aides ____ Counselors

Number of staff/teachers who speak: Spanish___; Hmong___; Cambodian___

Learning Process

Classroom Basics

Average class size (based on avg. daily attendance): _____

Percent of teachers with class size over maximum allowed by contract:

Sept:____ Oct:____ Feb:____

Percent of teachers reporting shortage of books and materials:

Oct:____ Feb:____

_____

Measures of Active Learning

Number of times students went on Field Trips (by grade):

____K ____1 ____2 ____3 ____4 ____5

Number of times guest speakers took part in classes:

____K ____1 ____2 ____3 ____4 ____5

Number of teachers making heavy use of collaborative teaching methods____

_____

Parental Involvement and Communication

Number of PTO meetings held: _____

Average attendance at PTO meetings: #____parents #____teachers/staff

Total parent membership of PTO: _____

____% Native American ____% Asian ____% Black

____% Hispanic ____% White ____% Other

Percent attendance at Open House: ____parents ____teachers/staff

Percentage of parents who met with teachers at conferences: _____

Number of parent newsletters sent home:____

____# Languages: (list languages)_____

Other parent activities/projects, participation rate, etc.:

_____

Availability and Use of Technology

Number of student computer workstations:

Apple/IIE____ IBM/PC____ TRS80____ Other____

Number of teacher computer workstations:

Apple/IIE____ IBM/PC____ TRS80____ Other____

Student time on computer per week: Avg. ____; Max. ____; Min. ____

Student satisfaction with technology:

(Components) Excellent:____ Satisfied:____ Unsatisfied:____

(Access) Excellent:____ Satisfied:____ Unsatisfied:____

Teacher satisfaction with technology:

(Components) Excellent:____ Satisfied:____ Unsatisfied:____

(Access) Excellent:____ Satisfied:____ Unsatisfied:____

SCHOOL/COMMUNITY REPORT

Learning Environment and Outcomes

School Goals

Staff Development and Communication

Faculty meetings: # _____ Total minutes: _____
Departmental meetings: # _____ Total minutes: _____
(Other) teacher meetings: # _____ Total minutes: _____

Topics of staff development:	Teacher ratings: Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
_____	____	____	____	____
_____	____	____	____	____
_____	____	____	____	____

Teachers: "Staff development meets my needs" Yes___% No___%

Satisfaction Ratings	Excellent	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Teachers: evaluation/feedback from principal	___%	___%	___%
Evaluation/feedback from colleagues	___%	___%	___%
Students: academic challenges	___%	___%	___%
relationships with teachers	___%	___%	___%
Parents: receive enough info	___%	___%	___%
from school			
teachers listen to me	___%	___%	___%

School Climate

	Days Absent 0-4	5-9	10-14	15+	Avg Daily Attendance Last Yr	-2Yrs
Students:	___%	___%	___%	___%	___%	___%
Teachers:	___%	___%	___%	___%	___%	___%

Grievances: ____Total; ____Facilities ____Class Overages ____Assignment ____Other

Suspensions: ____Total; ____1-day ____3-day ____5-day ____% Native American ____% Asian ____% Black ____% Hispanic ____% White ____% Other

Building: Student rating of cleanliness: ___% Excellent ___% Satisfactory ___% Unsatisfactory
Teacher rating of cleanliness: ___% Excellent ___% Satisfactory ___% Unsatisfactory
On (date), number of broken windows: _____
On (date), number of toilets/sinks that don't work: _____

Security: Number of assaults: _____ Larcenies: _____
Number of grievances concerning security/safety: _____

Special Academic Curricula

Description and Data about special purpose academic programs, e.g.,:

- ❖ Magnet programs: # students; # teachers; # years
- ❖ AP courses: # students in each; # students in 1/2/3/4 AP classes
- ❖ Number of students in: foreign languages; algebra; physics
- ❖ Percent of students in: college prep; general education; vocational education

Student Grade Distribution (by Race/Ethnicity)

K–2	A	B	C	D	F	3–5	A	B	C	D	F
Native American	%	%	%	%	%	Native American	%	%	%	%	%
Asian	%	%	%	%	%	Asian	%	%	%	%	%
Black	%	%	%	%	%	Black	%	%	%	%	%
Hispanic	%	%	%	%	%	Hispanic	%	%	%	%	%
White	%	%	%	%	%	White	%	%	%	%	%
Other	%	%	%	%	%	Other	%	%	%	%	%

MAT 6 Mean Percentiles (by Grade)

	1	2	3	4	5		1	2	3	4	5
Reading	%	%	%	%	%	Math	%	%	%	%	%
Language	%	%	%	%	%	Total Bat.	%	%	%	%	%

Number of LEP students mainstreamed by test scores:___, by parents:___.

Promotion, Retention, Graduates, and Dropouts

Number of students held back last year (by grade):
K:_____ 1:_____ 2:_____ 3:_____ 4:_____ 5:_____

Dropouts: ____Total; ____8th ____9th ____10th ____11th ____12th
____% Native American ____% Asian ____% Black
____% Hispanic ____% White ____% Other

Graduates: ___Total: ___16yrs ___17 ___18 ___19 ___20 ___21+

College Matriculation: ____% Applied ____%Matriculated
____% Two Year ____% Four Year

Recognition and Awards

Extent and content of recognition from outside community, including educational community, businesses, and service organizations for outstanding programs, achievement, performances, etc.

PROBE

PROVIDENCE BLUEPRINT
FOR EDUCATION

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An independent, community-wide assesment of the Providence Public Schools sponsored by the Public Education Fund.

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